

Indigo

FIVE WEEKS IN ICELAND.

BY

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I Dedicate

THESE PAGES

TO MY FELLOW-TRAVELLERS,

WHOSE

COMPANIONSHIP AND SYMPATHY

MADE MY

DAYS IN ICELAND HAPPY.



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FIVE WEEKS IN ICELAND.



CHAPTER I.

NORTHWARD HO !

SO the matter was settled. We had made up our minds, and our calculations of expenses ; we had heated our enthusiasm to boiling point, and each one of us looked upon himself as a hero. We were going to Iceland !

Out of the ranks of solicitous friends many prophets arose whose prognostications bewildered, but daunted us not. Some bade us guard against extreme heat, and hinted at sunstroke. Others warned us that the intense

cold of those regions was wont to deprive the unwary of their noses. A few shuddered at the thought of the dirt, soap and water being a combination unknown to the natives.

The inevitable bores who charge weak-minded travellers with commissions assailed us in crowds. We must plunder the north of fur, silver, stuffed birds, etc., etc. An æsthetic aunt of mine went so far as to implore me to get her a couple of walrus heads, to adorn the hall of her smart new mediæval mansion. We were profuse in promises, many of which ultimately partook of the proverbial pie-crust quality.

At last we tore ourselves away from these importunities, journeyed to Edinburgh, and embarked at Granton on board the S.S. "Camoens." It was in the sunny afternoon of the 24th of July, 1879, that we waved good-bye to the little group of friends who had gathered on the pier to wish us "God speed." Some of them looked after us regretfully, and would fain have accompanied us; and others, feeling that

our expedition would be fraught with all the hardships of a campaign, and crowned with none of its glory, preferred to stay quietly at home. So we steamed away across the tranquil waters of the Frith of Forth, towards the alluringly mysterious north.

We were a party of five, headed and organized by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Read. The latter was an old and dear friend of mine, having known me from what she justly termed my "barbarous childhood." I, Constance Forrester, and Alice Read, represented the weaker sex, and our number was completed by Mr. Gerard Blisset, and Mr. Henry Scott. We three younger ones had never met before, but under such exhilarating circumstances we were quite ready to fraternize without any further question.

No sooner had the outlines of Edinburgh Castle grown dim, than we began to explore the ship—a steamer of 1054 tons, with accommodation for about forty passengers, in pretty close quarters. The saloon was built on the

quarter-deck, with a hurricane deck above. It was a good-sized place, and comfortably fitted up. The cabins were down below, and opened out of each side of a tolerably broad passage. This led me to hope that the ventilation would be good, and the usual steamer odours quenched by a thorough current of fresh air ; but I afterwards learnt to my cost that space was not associated with healthy sweetness.

We found, to our great satisfaction, that the passengers only amounted to nineteen, including ourselves, therefore we were not forced into continual contact. The Reads occupied a state cabin, as also did the two young men. I, being in sole possession of the ladies' cabin, destined to accommodate six, imagined myself the luckiest of us all, until I discovered that the port-holes, being hermetically sealed, supplied light alone.

Oh, the odours ! Till I went on board the "Camoens," I never realized all the disadvantages of the sense of smell ! It seemed to me that the atmosphere of my cabin was steeped

in the very essence of complicated unsavouriness.

Our food was certainly not a feast for the gods, nor even for ordinarily fastidious mortals, and one required to be goaded by the severest pangs of hunger, before one could resolve on dining off veteran fowls with a flavour of feathers, and mutton or beef seamed with highly developed sinew in unexpected places. At first I shrank from these and like dainties, but before the voyage was half over, I fancy I afforded small profit to those who professed to keep our souls and bodies together on six shillings a day.

With one exception I will pass with discreet silence over our fellow-passengers, with whom, after all, we associated but little, for we were so complete and merry a party in ourselves, as to be quite independent of extraneous society. The only one to whom Alice and I spoke at all was an Iclander residing in Edinburgh, who was going on a visit to his native country, con-

cerning which he gave us a good deal of interesting information.

The voyage was uneventful enough, although very delightful to me, who so dearly love the sea. We steamed up the eastern coast of Scotland, keeping all the time close under the land. Upon leaving the Orkney Islands we came in for a heavy swell, and the "*Camoens*" rolled to such an extent that one felt uneasy as to how she would behave in a storm.

On the second day we passed amongst the Faroes, touching at Suderö to deliver letters and newspapers. We continued to thread our way amongst these picturesque and verdant little islands for several hours, and just succeeded in sighting Stromö (the chief of the group), which lay out of our course. Up to then, we had enjoyed consistently sunshiny weather. A few clouds settled on the mountain-tops, some of which rose 2000 feet above the sea-level. We were much struck with the wild beauty of the rocky cliffs, carved to all kinds of strange

fantastic shapes and devices, by the steadfast wash of the waves. The inhabitants of the Faroes are chiefly fishermen or farmers, and frequently combine both occupations.

Soon after this we left all trace of land behind, and emerged into the sweep of the Atlantic. That evening the sky clouded over, and the next morning broke raw and chilly. We were then about forty miles east of the south-eastern coast of Iceland, steering due north through a sombre grey sea. Over our heads, the blue of heaven was hidden by a canopy of motionless cloud, and away on the horizon a wan light lay low against the spread of water.

About five o'clock in the afternoon the temperature changed suddenly. We had left the gulf stream, and the wind blowing from over the glaciers to the west of us, the cold became severe; moreover, a thick fog enveloped us, and obliged us to go half speed.

This shut out all view of land, close to

which we were steaming, and gave rise to much disappointment, as we lost all the weird beauty of the coast.

In the course of the day, there was a little excitement in the announcement of the presence of whales. We went above, and I saw two enormous creatures disporting themselves quite near the ship, and spouting water ten and fifteen feet into the air. During the three days that we had been on our journey the sun had held dominion with increasing length of sway; finally night was altogether overcome, and that evening (July 27th) we paced the quarter-deck at 11 p.m., in complete daylight. The fog had somewhat cleared off, and away in the north, where the sun had but just disappeared, was a broad red glare, the first glimpse of colour that had brightened the scene that day. In the night the fog came on again with renewed thickness. The ship progressed but slowly, and the constant sound of the fog signals, added to the occasional stoppage of the engines, made sleep

uneasy. Several times I aroused myself and looked through the port-hole near my berth; there was nothing to be seen but a narrow space of sea, heaving in the ghostly light, and beyond a bank of fog.

Next morning, when I appeared in the saloon, I found the cold as great as ever, and could with difficulty keep warm at all. We were steering north-west, longitude 15° , latitude $26\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$. We took soundings of the temperature of the sea, and found it 42 degrees on the surface and 38 degrees at forty-eight fathoms below.

Soon after this we passed Langanes, the north-eastern point of Iceland, but the mists rendered it almost invisible: we had thus run up the whole of the eastern coast without once sighting it. We then turned our course due west.

The afternoon of that day brought about a wonderful change. We suddenly emerged from the chill fogs that had shrouded us for forty-eight hours, and found ourselves in a world of

colour and light. The sky stretched deep and pure above us, behind a fleece of wind-rent clouds ; the sea shook off the sullen languor that had held its waves in bondage, and they broke into thousands of gay, foam-crested ripples, dashing all green and white against the ship, whilst a penetrating sunshine spread life and warmth around.

Were it not for the bitter winds, we might have fancied it a spring day in the south. It was difficult to believe that we were passing along the northern coast of Iceland, within the Arctic circle ; yet there arose the hills of the mysterious island we had come so far to see, their bare brown slopes changing gradually in hue and form as we sped along. Away across the waters stood a stately chain of ice-crowned mountains, their varied peaks softened by the touch of the passing clouds.

I fear I cannot rightly describe that day, but I *felt* its glory. It was a dream realized ! All that was grey, and silent, and cold seemed left

behind, and this new, strange land was revealed to us at last.

We were steaming into the Bay of Húsavík, and passed on our way two small islands, rock-encircled and green. One of them was pierced through from side to side, so that we could see the waves gleaming beyond. Birds seemed to be the only inhabitants.

About dinner-time we reached Húsavík, and hove-to about a mile from land. I leant over the bows and looked at the tiny village above the cliff, nestling on the lowest slope of a hill. Such a small nook of earth, with scarcely a name, and certainly no significance in the minds of men!

About half-past seven we scrambled into the ship's boat, and were rowed towards the shore. We landed at a small, rough pier, and having climbed some steps to the top of the sandy cliff, we found ourselves in a village composed of one house and some half-dozen cottages. The house, built of black wood, with a

sloping-gabled roof like that of a Swiss chalet, belonged to the only well-to-do man in the place, an old friend of Mr. H——'s, our Icelandic fellow-passenger.

Húsavík is but a trading station ; and here this man exists, with his wife, children, and one or two relations, enjoying no other society but theirs. More of him anon.

Mr. H——, who had preceded us on shore, met us on our arrival, all eagerness to do cicerone to us. He insisted on our first visiting the church, and led us across the stretch of grassy land that separated it from the village. The ground was covered with hillocks, so close together that scarcely an inch divided one from the other, and put one in mind of a crowded and neglected graveyard. This was accounted for by Mr. H——, who informed us that the water which sinks into the earth becomes frozen, and thus expanding, raises the ground in irregular mounds.

We crossed two streams on our way to the

church, and soon reached the lonely little building, painted black, like all those we had already seen, the window-panes only being white. Around it lay a narrow space of consecrated ground, in which, beneath nameless mounds, reposed the dead, with only the long green grasses and waving buttercups for their monuments.

Two tombs alone rose and bore record of those sleeping below. One was of rock, surmounted by a marble cross, in the centre of which was carved Thorwaldsen's tender image of Night floating heavenwards with the sleeping children clasped upon her heart. Below this was a tablet, upon which was written, in golden letters, the names of those who had "gone before."

There was something to me profoundly appealing about this solitary God's-acre, standing aloof from the dwellings of men, alone in the presence of an austere and solemn Nature, washed by the waves of the northern seas, and

icily breathed upon by winds from the uttermost parts of the unknown world.

Then we entered the church, and found it a simple place enough, lavishly painted in different colours, and filled with narrow pews. Two chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling, one of which was rather handsome. Over the altar hung a picture of the Crucifixion, sufficiently badly executed, but quite a work of art compared to others I afterwards saw. Two fat candles stood on the altar; and except that there was no gaudy finery about, one was more reminded of a Roman Catholic than of a Lutheran church.

We bent our steps back to the village, pausing on our way to examine some cottages, three sides of which were covered with peat. They were actually built *into* the hill, and one might almost have passed over the grass-grown roofs without being aware of their existence. We did not penetrate the interiors, having been warned of the undesirability of so doing, both

as regarded the irritation of our olfactory nerves and other evils of which one runs the risk by contact.

We soon reached the house of the lord of the manor afore-mentioned. Several of our fellow-passengers were wandering aimlessly about in front of it ; some coolly peering through the open windows into the sitting-room, with the same unrestrained curiosity that they might have displayed at a wild beast show. Such are the ways of men and Britishers !

At this moment Mr. H——, who had gone into the house a few minutes before, reappeared at the door, followed by the master thereof, who was immediately presented to us, and invited us to enter. Whereupon we all, that is to say, our own quintett and about twelve others, crowded through the narrow passage into the sitting-room. There we found many signs of comfort, if not elegance, for so forlorn a place. White muslin curtains draped the windows, and pots of sweet-scented flowers stood on the sills.

Some prints hung on the walls, conspicuous amongst which were two of the King and Queen of Denmark, and a really handsome antique clock ticked in the corner. The room was well filled with furniture, and nicely carpeted.

Alice Read and I sat on the sofa with a table in front of us, and turned over an album of photographs, whilst the noble array of our fellow-passengers gathered round in attitudes denoting great uneasiness of mind, and embarrassment of limb. They were perfectly silent, and in no way did credit to their country, contrasting badly with the grace of manner of their Icelandic host. This latter was an exceedingly good-looking fair man of about forty, who spoke English beautifully, and showed every sign of education and refinement. His name was Guðjohnsen, and his calling in life that of a trader. He received goods from Denmark, for which he bartered the products of his own country, viz. dried fish, skins, furs, oils, etc.

Very soon the door opened, and Mrs. Guð-

johnsen appeared, bearing a tray covered with cups of coffee. She was dressed in the costume of the country, composed of a thickly-pleated black stuff skirt and a black bodice opening in front, and exposing a white chemisette. Round the throat, in place of a collar, was a coloured silk tie, and on her head she wore a round, flat, black cap, pinned on with hair-pins, from which suspended a thick black silk tassel, confined at the top by a tube of silver.

The coffee was accepted with that air of *mauvaise honte*, which so constantly paralyzes the energies of Englishmen directly they find themselves in an abnormal situation. It proved excellent with thick cream and cakes. For some time the solemn silence was broken only by a few remarks hazarded by Mr. Read and Mr. Blisset to our host. Mrs. Guðjohnsen kept passing to and fro with new relays of coffee, under the influence of which we began to expand, and the strings of our laconic tongues to be loosened.

Our hostess, though urbane in her manners, did not descend to speech, not being a linguist like her husband. She was entirely the "Martha" of the establishment, and addressed us only in our own vernacular when we were taking leave of her, for in answer to our civil little speeches of farewell and thanks, she replied, "Good-bye." No wonder she found that word an easy one to learn, if all her guests were of the same attractive calibre.

Half-an-hour later we returned to the ship. The sky had darkened over, and the sea lost its lovely liquid green. Across the bay at the foot of the mountains lay a narrow streak of gold, the only sign that remained to us of the fleeting radiance of that joyous afternoon. A bank of heavy clouds, hid from us the light of the sunset's fire, and so all colour faded, and we sailed away in the white silence of the northern night. I watched the tiny cluster of huts on the shore grow fainter and fainter, and thought how strange is Fate that had led us there, shown us

the picture of that simple life, and now was hurrying us away—for ever!

The next day, Tuesday 29th, was cold and grey, and the wind swept gusts of chilly rain into our faces. We rounded the northern coast, and steered towards Reykjavik in the south-west.

Towards evening the clouds and mists rolled away, and we leant over the bows, watching the hundreds of puffins and sea-gulls that skimmed over the crests of the waves. The former are curious little things with small wings, quite out of proportion to their bulky bodies, and long bills with which they burrow in the ground and make their nests. As the ship approached, they flew clumsily to one side, or dived out of sight. During the voyage we had seen plenty of cormorants, sea swallows, gulls, and solan geese—always, of course, when we were close to land.

That night we passed *Snaefells-jökull*, a mountain on the coast 4713 feet high, which is believed to be volcanic. One thing is certain,

that there are two peaks which never become covered with snow, even when the lower slopes are completely buried in it.

We remained on deck till a late hour, gazing with strange fascination at the mountain rising white and dim out of the shadowy water, and presenting new aspects and beauties as we moved along. Then when the first hint of dawn appeared on the southern side of *Snaefells*, while yet the last glow of sunset still hung in the sky, we went below.

The next morning we arrived at *Reykjavik*, the capital of Iceland, and the object of our journey.





CHAPTER II.

REYKJAVIK.

REYKJAVIK is built on the shore of a bay or fiord. On the opposite side of the water rises a chain of mountains that stretches away towards *Snaefells-jökull* in the north, and inland towards the east. Reykjavik is thus faced by a semi-circle of mountains. In the south, the land dips into the next fiord, and to the west lies the open sea.

It is a small town—so small that one could run from one end to the other in five minutes. From the sea it looks scarcely more than a collection of cottages, and if you went there with any idea of finding a town in the European

sense of the word, you would be woefully disappointed. But one should divest one's mind of all tendencies to compare when going to Iceland. One should lay aside all preconceived ideas and past experiences, and give oneself up to the reception of new impressions.

We went on shore about twelve o'clock—the Reads, Mr. Blisset, and myself. Mr. Scott would not be persuaded to accompany us, having heard that we intended interviewing the natives. His was a mind that rose superior to morning calls.

The houses in Reykjavik are made of wood, as, indeed, is universally the case in all parts of the island. They are rarely more than two stories high, and the rooms are seldom large. There seems to be no regularity in the plan of building, for there are no two houses in the town exactly alike. They are mostly detached, and have a space of land adjoining, in which cabbages, and sometimes potatoes, are grown. They are painted grey, or yellow, or black. Some, however, are all white; the governor's dwelling

for instance, being of an immaculate brilliancy.

The windows generally have a neat and gay appearance, with white muslin curtains, and pots of thriving flowers. Almost the first building that catches the eye, as one walks up the principal street, is the hospital, which used to be for leprosy, a disease at one time fearfully prevalent. This asylum is a dingy, ill-kept house, the very appearance of which suggests horrors.

The town only contains about half-a-dozen streets and one square, where, in the centre of a grass-grown enclosure, stands a statue of Thorwaldsen, the great sculptor, whose father was Icelandic, and of whom all Icelanders are immensely proud.

Up the hill, by the side of the sea, are the dwellings of the fishing population, removed to a certain degree from that part inhabited by the upper classes ; but in every quarter of the town the odour of the fish is painfully obtrusive. And not only does one smell it, but one sees it at

every turn, for large piles of cod and haddock drying in the sun line the sides of the streets.

The Reads had not undertaken this trip without proper social support, and landed at Reykjavik armed to the teeth with letters of introduction to the *élite* of the place—to wit, the governor, the bishop, the doctor, and the merchant.

We were all dressed in our nearest approach to "Sunday best," being desirous of taking the Reykjavik folk by storm. Mrs. Read, as the married lady of the party, was well to the fore, and her husband marched by her side, affectionately clutching his patents of respectability. Mr. Blisset and I meekly followed where our elders led, and being oppressed by no sense of responsibility or importance, we gave ourselves up to lively and unprejudiced criticism of the natives, who on their side certainly reciprocated our interest.

At first sight the Icelanders, though by no means handsome, are attractive. Perhaps this is

partly due to their nationality. Other races of the earth are familiar enough to us, but few amongst us have ever seen the inhabitants of the far North. For this reason, on first landing, one is apt to invest every man, woman, and child that crosses one's path with a certain charm. This charm, unless confirmed by after experience, wears away when constant contact has dispelled the glamour of novelty. My impressions that day counted for very little in my after estimate of Iceland and Icelanders. I never was one to make up my mind about anything at first sight. During the five weeks of my stay in Iceland, I had ample opportunities of forming an opinion, which shall be given hereafter.

And all this time we were wandering about the unsavoury Reykjavik streets, where women laden with fish passed backwards and forwards, and men with shaggy, unkempt heads, and faces literally buried in hair, stood about in groups and smoked. These belonged to the lower orders. The men of the class above them were

shaven and shorn, and wore modern garments, made according to the lights of the Reykjavik tailor, except, indeed, in the case of well-to-do and aspiring dandies, who received their wardrobes from Copenhagen.

The women were dressed in the costume already described as having been worn by Mrs. Guðjohnsen in Húsavík. As the national cap is not exchanged for one affording more protection out of doors, a diminutive parasol, generally of royal-blue or pea-green, is used to shield the complexion from the sun. A shawl is thrown round the shoulders, and sometimes muffled round the head.

Mr. Read accosted several of those who crossed his path, and begged them, in elaborately polite English, to direct him to the governor's house, but they all shook their heads and passed on.

At length we met a lady who had been to Scotland and spoke our language. She not only gave us the necessary directions, but offered to

accompany us on our visit. The house, which, as I said before, was freely whitewashed, had the air of a fairly prosperous workhouse. It stood within an enclosure of ground given up to the cultivation of cabbages. We walked up the path leading to the front door, which we found wide open. We rang the bell repeatedly, and as no one heeded our summons, we marched in without further ceremony, and burst suddenly upon Madame Alufa Finsen, the governor's wife, and two small daughters, in the sitting-room. They were all dressed in European costume.

Mr. Read presented his credentials with his best bow and a reassuring smile, of which the poor lady stood much in need, for she was evidently greatly flustered, and was too much taken aback at the unexpected advent of a batch of strangers to accept the letter, which Mr. Read still continued to proffer with lavish salaams. She led the way, quaking, into another and much larger sitting-room, where she waved us into chairs, and we finally launched into

conversation, using alternately French and English.

Madame Finsen does not profess to be a linguist. She is only at home in her own Danish, but on this occasion she certainly made heroic efforts to clothe her ideas in words ; and if she failed in anything, it was not in good will. She addressed most of her conversation to me, and in French. Alice joined in now and again, and Mr. Read at last managed to palm off his neglected letter.

Madame Finsen told us that she had lived in Reykjavik for many years, and that she did not find it at all dull. What inveterate cheerfulness and large resources must be hers ! She very seldom went to Copenhagen, but all her elder children were there, one of whom, a daughter, was married to an official at Court. I asked Madame Finsen how she liked the Icelanders ? and she assured me that she got on very well with them.

By-and-by in walked the governor—a fine-

looking man—dressed in diplomatic uniform. He was presented to us, but was more generous with stately bows than with words. Alice claimed him for her own at once, and shared him only with her husband. Their conversation, however, carried on in French, amounted to very little besides an interchange of compliments and statements on the part of the Reads.

I, meanwhile, continued to work my way with Madame Finsen, and announced to her our projected journey across the country to Akureyri—a distance of upwards of three hundred miles, where the “Camoens” was due on the 13th of August. Madame Finsen warned us that we should find the exertion very great, but supposed that being young and strong we should be equal to it.

Mr. Blisset had shirked his share of maintaining the flow of conversation under the excuse that his French was not sufficiently at command, which assertion on his part I since had good reason to doubt. He was probably

making up his mind to eschew visits for the future, as he lurked in a window, embracing his hat and stick. When anyone looked at him he broke into an uneasy smile. I was afraid to meet his eye, so fatal would it have been to my gravity. After a time refreshments were handed round, and we all partook of sherry and almond biscuits, after which we said good-bye to our new acquaintances, and hurried out into the open air.

"Now then," said the insatiable Mr. Read, fingering his next letter, "we must go and call on the bishop."

"Not for ten pounds!" cried Mr. Blisset, desperately, and, fearing compulsion, he made off briskly down a side street.

So, with our party thus diminished, we made our way to the bishop's house—a neat, grey building about a stone's throw from the governor's.

We were received in a pleasant little sitting-room by Miss Thora Pjettursson, the bishop's

daughter. She, probably, had heard of our arrival, for she seemed in no wise surprised to see us. She appeared to be a young lady of complete self-assurance, and evidently did all the entertaining of strangers, for Madame Pjettursson, her mamma, could give nothing but smiles to our reception, as all languages save her own were "Greek" to her. Miss Pjettursson's English was very good, and she appeared well-educated. She and her mother were both dressed after the fashion of European ladies, and Thora informed us that she had been on a visit to some friends in Edinburgh, who had taken her on a tour all over Scotland. She showed us her sketch-book, the contents of which, although somewhat rough, did not lack merit, the colouring especially being good.

By-and-by she sat down to her Copenhagen piano and played "The Maiden's Prayer," a ubiquitous and thoroughly detestable piece which I have heard and hated from my infancy upwards. But *piano* was evidently not Miss

Thora's "*forte*." I afterwards discovered that, amongst all the ladies in Reykjavik none could come up to a little English school-girl of twelve in that respect. The instinct and passion of music seems left out of the Icelandic composition.

Before the end of our visit the bishop himself came in. This reverend gentleman was well-stricken in years, and very hard of hearing, so that conversation with him was rather uphill work.

The house was well-furnished, and, as usual, prints of the King and Queen of Denmark adorned the walls. We were offered coffee and cakes as a matter of course. Icelanders are most hospitable, and one never pays a visit without receiving refreshments. The coffee is excellent. It generally comes from Brazil, and is roasted and ground at home, and only just before being used. It is made in a primitive fashion enough,—a linen bag, containing the coffee, being inserted in the kettle, and boiling water

poured into it. It is always served with cream, of which there is a never-failing supply. The cakes are delicious. They are all made at home, and remind one of German *bäckerei*.

After leaving the bishop's we paid two other visits: one to the wife of the chief professor at the College, whose house was certainly the prettiest in Reykjavik in point of architecture; but, like all the rest, built of wood. It also boasted a small apology for a garden.

We found Mr. Blisset engaged in examining the herds of ponies standing patiently in every street, with their noses very near the ground, and an aspect of complete docility. They were not in any way fastened or controlled, and never offered to move an inch, even when one patted them, or lifted their feet. They are about thirteen hands high on an average, and although they are like sheep when no one is on their backs, they have plenty of pluck and spirit, not to say temper, when once their saddles are occupied. Mr. Blisset was evidently

more deeply interested in Icelandic horseflesh than in Icelandic human nature.

Soon after this we returned to the ship for dinner, but the evening saw us on shore again. We then made the acquaintance of our guide, Thorgrimer Gudmunsen, who had been recommended to us by Mr. H—— as the very man suited to us. Gudmunsen presented us with letters of recommendation from other English people, whom he had conducted about the country, written in such enthusiastic terms that we believed ourselves in possession of a treasure.

He spoke English very well, and accompanied us to the store merchant's—an establishment not unlike the emporium of some fishing-village, with requirements fifty years behind the age. Here the Reykjavik mind lost itself in bewildered admiration of groceries, hardware, brilliant woollen goods, and such other evidence of a generous and wide-spreading civilization. A cluster of fishermen, with

unusually magnificent hirsute growth, leant against the counter and surveyed us with listless eyes.

We were received by the master of the establishment, a little round man with a shrewd face and expansive manners. He was a Dane, Thomsen by name, and only carried on his trade in person at Reykjavik during the summer months. The winter he spent with his family at Copenhagen.

He led us out of the shop through a back door, and up a wooden ladder to a chamber above, evidently his sleeping apartment. On the principle that "wine maketh glad the heart of man," he commenced proceedings by the inevitable proffer of refreshments, hoping thereby to soften us towards him, and drive the best possible bargain.

The others all seated themselves at a round table and discussed ways and means—otherwise food and necessities for our expedition across country. I meanwhile withdrew to the window,

and watched the unfamiliar sights in the street below. When I looked back at the group round the table, I noticed that they all seemed grave, if not tragic, as the prospect of short rations grew clearer and clearer.

"Sixteen loaves of bread," I heard one sigh ; "why, that is only one loaf and a quarter each per week!"

He looked mournful, and kept declaring that he was not particular as to quality, so long as we did not fail in quantity. At last everything was settled ; not so abundantly as some of us could have wished, but one is thankful for small mercies in Iceland.

We wandered about for a time, and then when the sun had set, and a chill wind blew across the sea, we returned to the ship, and paced the decks till a late hour. We could not accustom ourselves to go to bed by daylight ; and sleep, under the circumstances, became a mere detail in the disposal of our time.

The next morning I was awakened by an unwonted noise, that recurred with increasing regularity. I went on deck and found the men busy shipping ponies. I looked over the bulwarks and saw a kind of lighter, containing eight or ten of the patient beasts, closely packed. They allowed themselves to be hoisted over the ship's side, and swung down into the hold, without offering the slightest resistance. Out of more than three hundred only two gave the least trouble. These jumped overboard as they were being rowed to the ship, and swam away towards the shore. Poor little animals! they made that last effort for freedom to no avail; they were caught, and gathered to their brethren.

Ponies of late years have become a regular source of profit to Iceland. Numbers of them are exported every summer, and sent to Scotland, whence they are forwarded to all parts of the United Kingdom. They are used chiefly for mining work, or tradesmen's carts; the

rugged ground and wild life in their own country, unfit them for riding or driving purposes in ours ; and they have to be specially reared, if they be destined for either purpose. An Iceland pony costs from £5 to £20, according to its training.

Our guide, Gudmunsen, had come on board with half-a-dozen painted wooden boxes, into which, we were told, we must stow whatever we might require for our journey to Akureyri. We had all brought Gladstone bags and portmantaus with us from England, but were informed that they would prove perfectly useless for Icelandic travelling ; a fact which after-experience taught us to be only too true. As everything has to be carried by ponies, and the routes across Iceland run through rivers, and amongst wild mountains, the travellers' luggage must be so arranged as to withstand the chances of constant immersion, and destruction against the rocks that thrust themselves across every path.

The boxes with which Gudmunsen supplied us, were about fifteen inches high, ten wide, and twenty-one inches long. Being so deep and narrow, they were not very convenient for packing, but proved the best possible shape for fastening upon the baggage ponies. One box is placed on either side of the peat saddle, and secured together by straps passed through iron rings in each lid. Other rings in the lower parts of the boxes are used to support straps placed under the pony's body.

One of these boxes was given to each of us, and we went through all the agonies of packing. The whole morning was spent sorting and arranging; and, of course, we found that we had burthened ourselves with many unnecessary articles, which we decided to leave behind in our trunks on board the ship.

Each of the gentlemen had invested, before starting, in one of those ingenious waterproof contrivances, called "Sir Garnet Wolseley's," that have proved so useful to our soldiers at

the Cape. It contains a quantity of things by day, and forms at night a comfortable sleeping sack. I had brought with me a waterproof sheet, lined with flannel, into which I folded and strapped my shawls, rugs, and a little pillow, which added greatly to my comfort.

In the afternoon, we went ashore and did some sight-seeing. First of all, we visited the cemetery, situated behind the town, up a hill, at the foot of which lay a tiny lake. Here was also a church, very ugly and unpretending, and the only one in Reykjavik, besides the so-called cathedral. This latter was at the time under repair, and full of workmen, but we nevertheless went over it.

Under no circumstances could it have been beautiful or interesting; it was just like any ordinary Dissenting chapel. We were shown a picture, which generally hung over the altar, and was as worthless a production as one could well meet with. It was a modern work of art

by a Danish artist, and the subject of it was Christ rising from the dead, in a white gown, all scalloped at the edge! We surveyed this picture in decorous silence, but my frivolous thoughts wandered to an advertisement I had once seen in a shop in some little back street, "Pinking done here"—it was agony to suppress a smile.

But if the picture provoked no admiration, a font, the work of the great Thorwaldsen, claimed our highest praise. A graceful wreath of marble flowers lay on the top, and on each of the four sides were bas-reliefs, representing episodes in the life of our Saviour.

From the cathedral we proceeded to the college, where the golden youth of Iceland is educated. It was a good-sized building—the largest in the town—and much after the style of Government House. Here, also, the "Althing," or Parliament, is held for eight weeks every two years. One cannot truthfully say that politics in Iceland are conducted with undue precipita-

tion! The parliamentary recess affords ample leisure for mature reflection.

At the time of our visit to Reykjavik the Althing happened to be sitting, so we were fortunate in opportunities of studying the personal appearance of Icelandic M.P.'s. We were shown all over the college. It contained many rooms, all highly scented, scantily furnished, and absolutely uninteresting. We came away, impressed only with the fact that the political atmosphere was not over-pleasant to inhale.

Sight-seeing palled upon us at length, and we began to chafe with impatience to get back to the ship, for on our punctual arrival there depended our last chance of a hearty meal. The "Camoens" was to start on her return journey to Granton directly after dinner, and we would not have missed being present at that repast for a good deal, so we hurried off to the landing-stage. Alas! no boat was there! The ship was getting up steam prior to her departure—half our things were still on board, and—

our dinner! We waved our umbrellas and handkerchiefs, and shrieked "Ship ahoy!" till we were hoarse—in vain.

"There is no one on deck; they must all be at dinner," was the plaintive cry; and we felt our hungry hearts sink within us.

At last, a dirty cockleshell, with two boys in it, drew near. It proved to contain a cargo of revolting-looking fish, and was half full of water. Had these been the only drawbacks, we would cheerfully have overlooked them; but when we found that the boat could not possibly carry four extra persons with safety, we refrained, and, ravenous as we were, preferred losing our dinners to the risk of losing our lives.

After a blank and hopeless pause, Mr. Read gallantly came to the rescue, and, like a modern Decius, elected to sacrifice himself for the good of his countrymen. He cautiously perched himself in the stern of the leaky little craft, and was rowed off to the ship, whence, if he reached it in safety, he promised to send a boat

off to fetch us. We remained on the landing-stage, anxiously watching his progress, and giving vent to warning cries, beseeching him neither to laugh nor sneeze, nor even blink, lest such indulgence should prove his destruction and our undoing! At last, after much vexation of spirit, hope deferred, and cross purposes, we all got on board, and peace was restored with food.

Almost directly after dinner, we collected the few articles that had not already been sent on shore, and having ascertained from the captain that he expected to reach Akureyri on the 13th August, we bade him *Au revoir*, and were rowed back to the town. Ten minutes later, the "Camoens" steamed slowly out of the harbour.

We had arranged to spend the night at the only inn that Reykjavik possesses, an establishment worse than primitive, and which we did not enter without sore misgivings. However, it was only to be our shelter for one night, as the

next morning was to see us started on our journey across Iceland.

We spent the evening wandering about the town, and were taken by Gudmunsen to a house where stuffed birds were to be bought, in some of which Mr. Blisset invested. He and Alice Read were also persuaded into buying some silver ornaments in the shape of belts, and buckles, and snuff-boxes. As they were not particularly pretty or quaint, I refrained from like extravagance.

A yellow moon had risen, and was shining on the little lake, before we could make up our minds to tear ourselves from the fascination of lingering out of doors, and shut ourselves up within the four walls of our uninviting hotel.

We passed through a bare room, in which all our luggage was stowed, and climbed a ladder on to the floor above, where three apartments, to which the cells of monks would have been cosy, were given up to our use. Each one contained a wooden bed, with an eiderdown

coverlet of mysterious hue ; a table, with a basin and jug upon it ; and a chair. The partitions between the rooms being so thin, that each of us could easily have kept up a conversation with his neighbour.





CHAPTER III.

ACROSS COUNTRY.

THE next morning, August 1st, was as bright as even we could desire, for the sea was a sheet of shifting sunlight, and only a few idle clouds stretched high across the blank blue sky. We were all in a state of pleasant excitement, and most anxious to be off; but there was a good deal of delay before we made our start.

The road in front of the inn was crowded with our ponies, twenty-eight in all, five of which were to be ridden by ourselves, and three by the guides; the remaining twenty formed the "pack;" some of them being loaded with

our luggage, and others left in blissful freedom until their hour of trial should come.

Having heard of the disastrous effect of Icelandic sunshine on the complexion, Alice and I had armed ourselves with a receipt which we were told would prove a great protection to our skins. We smeared our faces with cold cream, and then covered them with powder. This application we promptly christened "Jezebel's Mixture," and made very merry over one another's bedaubed countenances. We tied thick gauze veils over our hats and round our throats; and, thus shielded, we defied the elements.

Truth compels me to state that the horrid mixture peeled off in large flakes before we had been an hour on our way; and very thankful we were to be rid of it. We tried it once or twice again, but the result was neither pleasant nor effectual; so we finally abandoned our receipt in disgust, and ignored our complexions altogether.

I must confess that in appearance we were a most ignoble pair of horsewomen! When, before leaving London, I suggested taking my habit as a matter of course, Mrs. Read pooh-poohed the idea, and airily asserted that Icelandic ponies were like Swiss mules, and that we should have no riding, properly so-called.

I, being confessedly ignorant and trusting, yielded to my friend; and my travelling wardrobe consisted of dresses just good enough to be worn out in the primitive spot to which I was bound. Thus our appearance in the saddle was "amateur," to say the least. I, in a dark-green gown, picked out with amber brocade, had the air of a shabby Diana Vernon!

At last, about ten o'clock, all was in readiness; we mounted our ponies and started for the north. Before we had gone half through the town Alice began to show signs of great discomfort, and to complain bitterly of her pony, who certainly appeared to be none of the easiest. When last I saw her she was bumping along

with a woe-begone face, and spending what breath she could spare in lamentations. I knew I could not be of the least service to her, and my pony was pulling my arms nearly out of their sockets, so I gave him his head, and we were soon galloping up the hill which leads out of the town, Mr. Scott, Gudmunsen, and I.

We went on about four miles, crossing the river Laxá, where salmon fishing is to be had, and halted at the foot of a belt of grass-grown hills to wait for the others. My pony was fairly easy, and covered the ground famously. I was delighted with him, and so full of excitement at the novelty of the whole proceeding, that I was ready to be charmed with everything, my rough saddle hardly excepted.

We sat on the grass looking anxiously out for the others, who came in sight at last, a despondent trio, plodding slowly onward. The long train of Alice's blue serge gown formed a dusty wisp which tickled the pony's legs, and caused him to caper still more unevenly than

was his wont. Over her miserable head she held her umbrella, to which she stuck, spite of all appeals to her pride, and ridicule on our part.

On joining us she dismounted thankfully, and declared she could not go on if she had to ride such animals as those she had already tried. This was disheartening, considering we had more than three hundred miles to go, and only a certain number of days for the journey, so as to arrive in time to catch the steamer.

In ten minutes the order was given to mount. Alice was the first to start, and, to my surprise, she shot past me with quite a complacent smile.

"A little repose has done wonders for her," thought I, but I soon found that her gain was my loss, for neither by my leave nor with my leave she had effected an exchange, and I was doomed to her "dot and go one" steed. My philosophy was not more enduring than Mrs. Read's, for not only was my new animal's action of the roughest, but no amount of blows would

egg him on—and I liked going on—so I had my saddle changed on to another, which, though in a different style, proved equally exasperating. This one kicked, plunged, and bolted to such a degree, that I was glad to get rid of him before he got rid of me !

The guide then saddled yet another pony, and I found him all I could desire, so "Richard was himself again," and I went on my way rejoicing. I soon overtook the others, and covered the wily Alice with reproaches, to which she made the very sensible answer that if she had not taken my easy pony she could not have gone on at all, and that would have delayed the whole party. Shortly after this we halted again, and got some milk from a farm-house near at hand, but we did not linger long, and were soon on the road again.

I felt entirely happy. The beauty of the day, the unfamiliar scenery, and the keen sensation of a novel experience, all harmonized and filled me with delight.

Sometimes galloping briskly, and at others wending our way leisurely, we passed onwards towards the heart of this most desolate land. We crossed grassy plains, scattered here and there with tufts of purple heather, clusters of buttercups, and patches of ruddy leaves, harmless amongst which lay the whilom deadly boulders of lava, telling of days when the eruptions of Hekla, Skaptarjökull, Kötlugiá, and other volcanoes, cast darkness and destruction everywhere.

We stopped about three o'clock in a green valley, through which a river wound its way noisily over the rocks and stones. Here we made our first *al fresco* meal. We were hungry, but ate sparingly, as we bethought ourselves of the long journey before us, the scantiness of our larder, and the difficulty of replenishing it.

After half an hour's repose on the grass we remounted our ponies, and threaded our way along the river-bed, where the track (there are in Iceland no roads as we understand the word)

led us to the base of the barren hills by which we were surrounded.

Then we began to ascend, and our scattered cavalcade moved forward through such solemn scenes that the very sunshine brought their weirdness into stronger and sadder contrast. The mountains rose higher, and cast their dark and jagged outlines against a sky where prim-rose blended with the blue, and cast a hint of colour on the pools of silent water in the plains.

Flocks of plovers and curlews rose now and again from amongst the crevices in the rocks on all sides of us. Once or twice some ptarmigan crossed our path, and we passed many a solitary raven perched on a crag of lava, motionless and solemn as a statue. They seemed in keeping with the weirdness of the land. The badge of Iceland should be a raven, for the bird is always to be seen, in her saddest places, and on her wildest rocks—steadfast as destiny.

Mile after mile we went, crossing streams, passing through narrow gorges, and galloping

over stony reaches, till we saw in the distance a wide stretching and most lovely lake, behind which the flame of sunset was spreading in the sky.

It was nearly two hours later when we halted suddenly at a chasm that seemed to open all at once under our feet, and Gudmunsen informed us that we had reached Almannagjá, the cleft in the lava 180 feet deep, which leads down into the wonderful sunken plain of Thingvalla, our destination for the night.

Lord Dufferin's charming book had somewhat prepared me for this abrupt arrival at our journey's end; but I was, nevertheless, rather taken aback. We had ridden forty miles in nine hours, halting three times.

We dismounted at the mouth of the chasm, for it looked so steep that we did not care to descend it on our ponies, sure-footed and careful though they were. The moment I put my foot to the ground, I felt everything reeling around. I had not realized till then how tired

I was, for I had been too completely happy to think of fatigue. Riding in Iceland is a far greater exertion than elsewhere, both on account of the roughness of the ponies, and of the ruggedness of the country.

I rested for a moment at the entrance of the passage of *Almannagjá*, and then proceeded to descend it. Mr. Blisset led his own pony and mine, and I followed slowly, discovering, for the first time, the immense inconvenience of stiff joints. We passed down between two walls of lava, turned through a cleft to our right, and found ourselves on a broad and curious plain.

To describe Thingvalla accurately is impossible. It is like nothing that one has seen or imagined. Many have written about it, but no account ever conveyed the true impression to my mind, and I fear there is little chance of my inexperienced pen doing justice to this extraordinary phenomenon.

The bare facts are these: Centuries ago an

eruption of nature took place, which covered that part of the country with a flood of lava. Two enormous rents then formed, parallel to each other, and about twelve miles apart. The outer sides of these two fissures stand about eighty feet higher than the inner ones, they having remained stationary, whilst their *vis-à-vis* were dragged back by the weight of the sinking plain between them.

This latter is called Thingvalla, and sank probably on account of the softness of the ground on which it rested. It is supposed to have encroached on the northern bed of the lake, which now forms its south-western boundary. This theory receives additional colour from the fact of the head of the lake and the sunken plain being exactly the same breadth. Thingvalla itself is torn by innumerable parallel chasms, all the result of the contraction of the lava as it cooled; they are now filled with intensely cold clear water. All around rise bare and desolate mountains, to which the

grass-grown plain forms a restful and soothing contrast.

Having passed out of the shadow of *Almannagjá*, we saw the whole valley sweeping before us wrapped in the pallid twilight. On some elevated ground, to our right, stood a little church, and beyond that again a farmhouse.

Between us and these buildings rushed the turbulent stream *Öxará*. It bursts in a roaring waterfall over the taller wall of the fissure we had just descended, flows for a short distance within that fissure, and then breaks away through a cleft in the inner wall out on to the plain, and loses itself eventually in the lake.

We remounted our ponies at the brink of the stream, and rode across it to the church. We then made the alarming discovery that we must pocket our prejudices, and all put up in the sacred building for the night. It was evidently the only asylum for travellers, as no other accommodation was to be had.

Our luggage was soon bundled in, and we

proceeded to turn the church into an untidy living room. It was a dirty little place, about twenty-four feet by fifteen, and contained two rows of rough pews. A cupboard did duty for an altar, and the railing by which it was surrounded gave it a more lively appearance. Above, hung a picture of a group of dislocated saints ; a pulpit, two windows, and a gallery, complete the sum total of fixtures.

In the chancel, on one side of the altar, stood a big wooden bed, containing a dirty eider-down mattress. This was destined for Alice and myself.

The provision boxes were the first to be disgorged ; and, alas ! owing to the defective packing of our treasure, Gudmunsen, we found that chaos reigned within, and many of our good things were spoiled. Pepper, salt, rice, and biscuits, all burst their bonds and amalgamated. This was discouraging, but we were too hungry to waste time in reproaches.

We spread our meal on a table in front of

the altar, appropriating the two solemn-looking candles for our enlightenment. We devoured cold beef, and drank whisky and water, grouped round the table on benches ; and those of us who could find no place thereon, perched on the altar rails.

The Lutheran priest of the church joined us, and bade us consider the building entirely at our disposal. Gudmunsen also partook with us, and his conscience in no way interfered with his appetite. His manners at meals were eccentric to say the least, and he had a trying way of appropriating his neighbour's tumbler.

Although he condescended to accept six crowns a day, for which sum he guaranteed to act as guide, he made it clearly understood that he mixed with travellers on equal terms, and considered he had more than done his duty if he translated their orders at his leisure to the men who acted under him.

This was not quite the sort of thing that we anticipated : we stood more in need of a *guide*

who would attend to our creature comforts, than of a *philosopher and friend*. It is certainly true that Gudmunsen's father was a literary man of no small importance, but as the son hired himself out for a certain purpose, we were a little disappointed that it was not properly fulfilled.

After our meal, we were supplied with coffee and cream from the farm-house, and waxed so lively, that the candles seemed to burn with indignation at our frivolity. Soon after this we began to think of settling for the night, and there was some talk of banishing our mankind to the gallery. However, having groped their way up the ladder and inspected their would-be dormitory, they discovered that it was quite filled with boxes, clerical garments, and dried fish. This is constantly the case all over Iceland, and sometimes the whole church is turned into a general store-room.

Thus defeated in their last effort at retaining a vestige of decorum, the gentlemen had to seek other resting-places. They tried every spot in

the church, and at last Mr. Read and Mr. Blisset spread their Garnet Wolseleys on one side of the altar, whilst Mr. Scott stretched himself out down the aisle, with his feet pointing towards the east.

We were obliged to leave the door open, as the windows were not made with a view to ventilation. Mrs. Read and I curled ourselves up on our mattress, the horrors of which had been concealed by my waterproof sheet. When we were fairly settled, and the others, packed up in their Garnet Wolseleys, looked like three well-preserved mummies, we noticed that no one had thought of putting out the candles. Mr. Scott promptly flung his boots at them, which did the deed with such violence, that next morning the candles looked bowed down with shame at having been compulsory witnesses of our sacrilegious orgies.

At last a complete silence fell upon the scene, and the tired travellers wandered only in the land of dreams.

The first thing in the morning, the men betook themselves off to bathe in the Öxará. Alice and I determined to follow their example, and chose a secluded bend in the river, where we performed our ablutions. Although the water was icy cold, I swam about, and greatly enjoyed my bath, after which I felt much invigorated and refreshed. We hurried back to the church, where we completed our toilettes. Boxes, rugs, food, and clothes were scattered about in the direst confusion, and we dressed under difficulties, to the tune of such exclamations as these—

“Constance, have you seen my brush?”

“Yes, there it is, on the altar.”

“Oh, Alice, I can’t find my skirt anywhere.”

“Surely, that is it hanging over the pulpit.”

I am quite aware that these remarks sound terribly profane, but my readers must put themselves in our place before judging us too harshly. The church had been given up to our use by the officiating clergyman. It was our only shelter,

and having been put by us, from the first moment of our entering it, to commonplace and mundane uses, it was never invested in our eyes with the solemnity of a sacred building, and we could not realize that it was a church at all.

As the whole place was greatly encumbered with our luggage, breakfast was served outside, in a space of ground enclosed within a rough wall composed of fragments of lava, piled one upon another. I suppose this enclosure was, properly speaking, the churchyard.

We made a hearty meal off boiled char, caught in the lake and cooked at the neighbouring farm-house. This we ate off very doubtful plates, cut up our woodeny bread with a knife that was common to all of us, and drank out of three tumblers amongst six. Gudmunsen conducted matters with such dexterity, that the fish arrived first, and had ample time to cool whilst we clamoured for salt, bread, butter, and water. These luxuries certainly appeared in the end—but only in the end.

It had been decided to spend that whole day at Thingvalla—less, be it confessed, to explore the wonders thereof, than to quench the sportsmen's thirst for blood, and to afford an opportunity of rest to Alice, who was still suffering from the effects of the first few disastrous miles beyond Reykjavik.

I felt perfectly fresh, although still conscious of stiffness, which I determined to get rid of by riding for a little way with Mr. Read and Mr. Scott, one of whom was intent on fishing, and the other on shooting. Mr. Blisset decided to go out on foot with Gudmunsen in search of curlew; and Mrs. Read's mind was a blank on every other subject than that of sketching.

Thus we all went our different ways. We three, escorted by one of the under-guides, set off across the rocky plain, green with low-lying bog-myrtle, and rosy with heather. The track was so narrow that we were obliged to go in single file, our ponies springing with wonderful

agility over the stones and boulders. We passed across many a rift and chasm, in the depths of which we could see the shadowed water lying cold and still.

When we had gone about six miles, and were approaching the distant edge of the lake, I felt it was high time to wish the others good luck, and turn back, for they were going much further in search of spoil, and my pony was a stranger, and so rough that riding him was more a matter of principle than of pleasure.

It was a new sensation to be riding alone across the desolate valley—alone with thought-creating nature in her wildest garb, rising proudly above man's domination; barren and bleak, but intensely free.

How awful would be the scene in winter! Now, the August sunshine threw a yellow haze over the rugged shoulders of the sentinel mountains, and wrapped the plain in a golden garment. A gentle wind was chasing some fleecy clouds across the sky. In the distance

lay the shining lake. Thingvalla was beautiful that day.

In the afternoon we went to see the "Lögborg," or law-mountain, where, in the old days the Althing (Parliament) used to sit. This extraordinary spot is a tongue of land running upwards between two deep chasms, and approachable only from the south, where a strip of lava-covered ground connects it with the plain. It is widest in the centre, and grows gradually narrow at each extremity. The further end contracts into a headland of lava, beyond which the two chasms meet and yawn fathoms deep before one's awe-struck eyes.

By cautiously peering into the moss-edged cleft one catches sight of the gleam of water in the mysterious depths below. In one spot the two walls of the chasm to the right lean forward towards one another, and this was the scene of a desperate leap for life, accomplished, in the olden times, by one Flosi, who pursued by his enemies, and unable to make his

way to the usual exit, sprang across the horrible gulf and escaped that certain death which awaited him had he not risked the leap.

After clambering to the highest and narrowest point, we wended our way back to the centre of the Lögberg, where, in the dead and gone days of Iceland's glory, the voice of her sturdy people proclaimed the law. Ichabod! Ichabod! The warrior hearts of her eldest children have long since ceased to beat—those hearts of fire and arms of iron that loved and fought so well! But the song of the Sagas is not silenced yet, and teaches us the passionate legends of days when Time was young!

Centuries of oppression have broken the old, dauntless spirit of the north—the pulses of the nation have grown sluggish, the paralysis of impotence and age is creeping surely through her veins, and, unless she break phoenix-like from the ashes of her spent splendour, filled with new vigour and life, her days are indeed numbered.

Thus musing, we made our way back to the church, within which our dinner of boiled char was spread. There was a good deal of monotony in our menu, and our meals were the least agreeable event of the day. Of course we all expected to "rough it" when we came to Iceland, and enjoyed doing so by way of novelty, but we certainly underwent a great deal of unnecessary discomfort that would have been spared us had we been blessed with a less gently-born and more active guide.

After dinner we all assembled outside and compared notes. Mr. Scott had shot some half-dozen curlew, and Mr. Read had caught as many salmon as he could bring home, in spite of the plague of flies that did their best to penetrate the gauze veil with which his head was enveloped. Alice had taken two excellent sketches, and, having crossed the Öxará in a crazy old boat, was shown the ruined foundations of houses, which had been inhabited in the times when the Lögberg was the seat of

parliamentary debate. Mr. Blisset and I were the only two idle ones, but we were lavish with praise of our more energetic 'friends.

As the evening wind was bitterly cold, and having no sitting-room save the inevitable church, and no seats more luxurious than pews and benches, we decided that the sooner we retired to sleep, the better—particularly as Gudmunsen warned us that we should be called at six o'clock next morning, in order to have a long day for our journey to the Geysers.

On this occasion Alice and I were bereft of our wooden bedstead and suspicious-looking eider-down mattress. These luxuries were required at the farmhouse, whose utmost resources were called into play for the accommodation of a party of travellers from Reykjavik—all Icelanders—who, finding the church occupied, did not scruple to fall back upon this unenviable lodging.

Just as we were falling asleep we were roused by the sound of singing without. Alice and I

rose at once and stood by the door listening. On the slope leading to the river were grouped a number of men and women, evidently the new-comers. They were singing the prayer from the "Freischutz," and the ring of their clear, sweet voices flooded the silent valley with harmony.

When the psalm was ended came a moment's pause, and then the well-known music of our own English national hymn rose on the chill, grey air. We were delighted.

"They must have heard who we are, and are singing 'God save the Queen,' out of compliment to us!" cried we gratefully; and when the last note died away, we clapped with great enthusiasm.

Next morning we found that we were mistaken in laying that flattering unction to our souls. Iceland claims our national hymn as her own, and the serenade was not in our honour at all.



CHAPTER IV.

THE GEYSERS.

THE next morning, true to his threat, Gudmunsen roused us from our slumbers at six o'clock. We had all bathed in the river, dressed, and packed up long before the char was boiled for breakfast, and that meal had been despatched some time before the ponies were assembled and things were in readiness for our departure. This being the case, we were inclined to doubt the necessity of our having been called so early, and thus deprived of rest for no apparent object.

It was past ten when, after much dawdling on the part of the guides, we made our start

across the plain, skirted the lake, and arrived at Ravnegià, the opposite rampart of lava corresponding with Almannagjá.

On leaving Thingvalla by this, its eastern barrier, the track ascends gradually, and then crosses the fissure by a narrow bridge formed of masses of rock and lava which have fallen across the gaping chasm. This natural pass is by no means an easy one, for it rises in some parts almost perpendicularly, but there are few obstacles that an Iceland pony will not overcome, so we soon found ourselves in safety on the high ground above the fissure.

We paused a moment to rest our steeds, and give a last look at the weird loveliness of the sunken plain and lava-cradled lake. Away in the distance we could see the dark parallel ridge of Almannagjá, crossed at one spot by a thread of restless silver—the fall of the river Öxará.

Then we turned our ponies' heads and continued our journey to the Geysers. The track

led us through scenery more magnificent and more terrible than that through which we passed on our first day's ride. We threaded our way amongst mountains that rose around us like giant cinders, and galloped across rocky stretches of land without even a blade of grass to remind us of Nature's tender moods.

We climbed over stony hills, down steep descents, and crossed many streams, descending at last on to a far-sweeping and grass-grown plain. A lake lay in the distance, and at its brink some hot springs, the vapours rising from which could be seen from all the surrounding country.

Far away on the horizon stood a belt of sombre mountains, and in their midst was Hekla, the stronghold of desolation, and the agent of those unquenchable sources of destruction which have made of this tortured land an everlasting witness of their deadly power.

Between two and three o'clock we dismounted for luncheon close to a farm-house perched on

the lower slopes of a hill, the base of which was washed by the waters of the lake. We were all as usual eager for the food which Gudmunsen leisurely unpacked. Thanks to our sportsmen, our meal was an unusually luxurious one.

Afterwards, we wandered down the hill to see the hot springs; they burst out of the ground about twenty yards above the lake—two are much larger than the others, and some so small as to be mere incipient bubbles. The edges of the springs are formed of a pale yellow sulphurous deposit, sufficiently brittle to allow of our breaking off fragments to carry away as specimens.

We stood by the largest spring, and watched the water rising like a blue ball, burst foaming at the surface, and overflow in little boiling springs, which finally lost all their heat and excitement in the chill tranquillity of the lake. The smell of sulphur, though quite apparent, was not disagreeably strong.

Half-an-hour after we all mounted and sped

away across the plain through which a river flowed. So twisted was its course, that the track led us across it several times, and in some parts the bogs on either side obliged us to follow the river-bed. At one point the bank down which we had to scramble into the swiftly running water, quite four feet deep, was very steep and slippery. Some of our ponies were frightened and tried to avoid it, but they eventually all, with one exception, carefully picked their way down.

Alice was close behind me, and as her pony showed some signs of unwillingness, one of the guides dismounted and led it down into the stream. I was splashing along ahead when I heard an agonized gasp. Alice's pony had slipped, and she, losing her presence of mind and her seat, shot straight out of her saddle on to the neck of the discomfited guide, to whom she clung with a desperation that was less flattering than overpowering.

He staggered beneath her weight, and did

his best to push her back into her proper place. Her foot was entangled in the stirrup—his hat fell off into the river—the pony fidgeted—and two or three violent efforts on the part of the panting pair to part company resulted in a more convulsive embrace than ever.

It was the funniest sight I ever beheld, and I am afraid I was unfeeling enough to laugh till the tears rolled down my cheeks. At last, when the guide was black in the face, and Alice had no breath left, she was restored to her saddle, and we continued our journey without further mishap.

Soon after this, we broke into a furious gallop, which never slackened till we reached the edge of the plain, and mounted a steep hill. We rode for some time over very rugged ground, but eventually found ourselves amongst hills, thickly covered with bog myrtle and other shrubs, two or three feet in height. It was our first real experience of vegetation—such as it was—in Iceland, for up to that moment blocks

of lava and arid reaches had almost frustrated the struggle for existence of the scantily-scattered verdure.

At first we were delighted to rest our eyes on something green and living, but after a short time we changed the burden of our song. The track was so narrow that we had to follow it one after the other, and this spoiled conversation. Moreover, we could not console ourselves with a canter, as we were sunk in a deep rut, and the gentlemen were in danger of dislocating their ankles every time they increased speed. They were obliged to tuck their feet under their ponies and go slowly.

This order of things, which lasted more than two hours, was dull unsociable work, and we were greatly relieved when we descended the hills on to an extensive plain. Far away we could see rising the vapour of the Geysers—a welcome sight, for we were tired and hungry.

At this point of our journey, we crossed a broad and rocky river—the Brúará, or bridge

the river. The water rushed along in impetuous torrents, breaking with a roar over the numerous falls. Our ponies waded cautiously across, and here a curious sight presented itself. The bed of the river was cleft asunder just midway between the banks, and two foaming torrents of clear water dashed over the edges of the rift and mingled in the chasm beneath.

Across this were placed a few planks, which did duty for a bridge—a bridge in the very middle of the river, *not* from side to side—and we passed safely over.

On we went till we came in sight of a farmhouse, nestling at the foot of a hill. We rounded the latter, rode across a space of sandy ground, and the Geysers were reached.

The pack had gone on before, and we found everything in readiness for us. Our own tent was pitched, and another, and far larger one, which had been borrowed from the farmhouse, was in the course of erection. I had arrived at a state of limp collapse after my fifty miles'

ride, and desired nothing but repose, whilst Alice was, for her, singularly brisk. Half-an-hour's rest in the smaller of the tents worked wonders for me, and by that time our dinner was spread on the ground in the gentlemen's tent.

It was an unsatisfactory sort of meal, for we all had to assume attitudes that were more contracted than graceful, being rather cramped for space. We were enlivened, however, by the sudden apparition of a drunken man, who plunged into the tent, and offered us his company. The guides soon plucked him forth, and he went away grumbling at our lack of hospitality. I had heard a good deal about Icelandic intemperance, but this was the first specimen of excess we had come across. Certainly our experience was limited, and we had yet much to see and learn.

After dinner we all sallied forth to explore the Geysers. The great Geyser, near the base of which our tents were pitched, is contained in

a circular basin, seventy-two feet in diameter, and four feet in depth. It occupies the summit of a mound of siliceous concretion. This is honey-combed, and wrought into all manner of strange devices and deep channels, by the action of countless scalding streams; overflowing the edges of the basin, they escape down the slopes; in the hollows are quiet pools of tepid water deposited there during the last eruption, and left to cool until the next.

A dense white column of vapour rises from the petulant seething surface of the spring, and betrays its presence to the surrounding country. We stepped across the little hissing rivers, picked our way amongst the pools, and found ourselves on the brink of the basin, watching, with absorbing interest, the continual bubble and boil and overflow of the lovely emerald-tinted water.

Not being a geological student myself, I will refrain from descanting on the researches of those who are, and shall therefore not attempt

to give, second-hand, any scientific description of the Geysers, their causes, and their history. There are many excellent authorities on the subject to whom those amongst my readers who require enlightenment can turn. An article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," entitled *Geysers*, will furnish sufficient information for the most inquiring.

So fascinating to Alice and myself was the contemplation of this uncanny spring, that, although nearly wet through with steam, we could not tear ourselves from the spot. We did so at last, but only to return almost immediately with our pocket-handkerchiefs and towels, which we proceeded to wash in one of the pools of warm water close to the edge of the Geyser. After a plentiful soaping, we rinsed our linen in a boiling stream, holding on to it nervously, with a cautious finger and thumb. With an unlimited supply of hot water laid on by nature, the lines of Icelandic washerwomen are cast in convenient places.

Having subjected everything on which we could lay our hands, including the black ribbons of my fur cape, to a thorough cleansing, we bethought ourselves of retiring for the night to our tent, much elated at the prospect of privacy.

We covered the hay with which the ground was strewn with my waterproof sheet, and found it a much more comfortable resting-place than the boards of our grimy church.

Next morning, the gentlemen went off betimes to a river about half a mile away, and Mrs. Read and I determined to enjoy a warm bath. And this was the occasion of a terrible scare of which I was the humiliated victim.

Alice having completed her operations, had returned to the tent, and I was still splashing contentedly in a pool of warm water, about a couple of yards from the edge of the basin, when I heard an ominous rumble below me like distant thunder, and the surface of the Geyser began to rise and seethe.

An eruption, I had been told, is always preceded by such warning sounds. For one moment the horrible thought of being boiled alive almost paralysed me. The next saw me scampering for dear life down the slopes, recklessly dashing through streams, and never pausing till I gained the tent, into which I rushed with my hair on end with fright!

But, alack! it was a false alarm! No eruption took place after all; and I learnt that the Geyser, when lazily inclined, has a habit of asserting itself thus, without going the length of a regular outburst.

Of course, I was much ridiculed for my ignominious flight; but I consoled myself with the conviction that not one amongst us would have remained on the spot to make sure that an eruption was coming, before he put himself in safety.

Although we were most anxious to see the great Geyser in action, we had no time to linger for that purpose. These celebrated hot springs

are not in the direct route between Reykjavik and Akureyri, and we had come two days' march out of our way to see them. It was therefore decided that we should retrace our steps to Thingvalla that same day, and proceed to the north without further delay, for fear of arriving too late to catch the "Camoens."

Whilst our ponies were being collected, and tents and baggage stowed away, we wandered about the hot, dry ground. I examined the minor Geysers. Besides a large number of those already extinct, there are one hundred and thirty-five active springs, the most remarkable of which is the well-known Strokkur. It does not rise into a cone, and has no basin; it is merely a hole about ten feet across, the boiling water surging six feet below.

Unlike the great Geyser, whose magnificent eruptions can only be witnessed by waiting its own good pleasure, the Strokkur can always be bullied into a demonstration, if only sufficient pressure be applied. So, as the former would

not "stand and deliver," we determined to tackle the latter.

The guides collected a quantity of peat, which they hurled down into the Strokkr's discoloured jaws. We stood by expectant. Presently we heard the water grumbling and spluttering below; then it rose angrily to the surface of its hole, and overflowed the edges with muddy waves, retiring again with a snarl into its den.

This happened twice with increasing irritation; but the distasteful dose was not to be got rid of so easily. Thus baffled, the Strokkr's wrath knew no bounds, and it leapt suddenly a hundred feet into the air, casting up large fragments of peat and mud. It sank only to rush up again in another brown torrent as high as the last.

We stood at a safe distance, like a party of mischievous children, and shouted with excitement and glee as one column of water followed another in rapid and furious succession. There

was something positively human about this poor, exasperated spring, its complaints, its struggles, and its exhausted mutter of relief when, at last, having cast out its indigestible load, it returned to the peaceful seclusion of its hole.

An Englishman once made a bet that he would leap across that same hole. He won his bet, but ran the risk of an instant and horrible death in the boiling cauldron.

We were all immensely disappointed at having to come away without seeing an eruption of the great Geyser. We had heard such glowing accounts of the stately tower of water that rises white and gleaming, sometimes three hundred feet into the air, shrouding its beauty in clouds of vapour; and it was provoking to see it with the eyes of faith alone. Formerly eruptions were very frequent; now they take place about every two or three days.

At ten o'clock, we were told it was time to

be on the move ; but a serious matter had to be settled before we could start.

Alice's easy pony, to which she had cleaved with obstinate tenderness ever since she first decoyed him from me, had struck work at last ! His lack-lustre eye, sore back, and broken spirit, all pleaded with dumb eloquence for rest !

It is the rule in Iceland to change your animal at the half-way halt ; but Alice, with her bitter experience of native steeds, had refused to part with the only pony she could ride with comfort.

Now, however, there was nothing to be done but to make a choice of evils, and she mounted one animal after another, and gave each a trial trot. After undergoing much torture of body and mind, she hit upon one worthy to be her victim—or to make her his—and we set off.

I may as well explain here that Icelandic ponies are nearly all pacers, and as they advance the fore and hind leg on the same side, and then the fore and hind leg on the other side, it is

easy to imagine what an extraordinary shuffling gait is theirs, and how utterly unlike the movements of ordinary horses. It is impossible to rise when they trot, so one is obliged to bump along like a soldier or a policeman.

This makes riding in Iceland most unpleasant to those who object to be well shaken. For my part, I did not mind it, and found the best plan was to gallop briskly whenever the ground permitted, and to fall into a leisurely walk when my pony required rest. This manner of proceeding was far less fatiguing than the continual jog-trot, without increasing or decreasing speed, in which Alice obstinately indulged. But she would not be convinced.

About three o'clock, we reached the place where we had lunched the day before. Our morning's ride had not been as pleasant as usual, for poor Alice was miserable in her new estate ; and as I remained close to her, none of my usual exciting scampers could be indulged in. Anything faster than a shambling walk was purga-

tory to her, and her patience and fortitude were fast forsaking her.

By the time we arrived at the half-way halting-place, she was thoroughly ill, and could hardly be persuaded to eat any of the lamb which Gudmunsen bought at the farm, and had boiled in the Geysers.

Soon after luncheon we were all on the move again. Alice decided to keep her rough pony to a walk the whole way to Thingvalla, preferring a prolonged stay in the saddle to speed and bumps! Mr. Read preferred to ride with his wife, and we three others left the pair to their own devices, and pushed on ahead with the pack.

I made up for my sober riding in the morning by galloping for several miles, and the young men went even faster than I did. In fact, Mr. Blisset shot so far ahead, that he lost the track, and had to retrace his steps.

Suddenly, as we were going quickly down hill, my pony put his foot on a loose fragment of rock, slipped, and fell straight on his nose. I

rolled over, and avoided his legs, but was up again in a moment, quite unhurt, although rather startled by the unexpected collapse. My companions helped the pony on to his feet, and were profuse in inquiries after my well-being. No damage more serious than a bruise or two was done either to rider or steed, although I had certainly run the risk of breaking some bones against the blocks of lava with which the path was strewn. Happily for me, I had fallen on the only patch of soft ground.

I was smitten with much shame concerning this adventure, and begged the others not to bear witness against me to the Reads, who would be sure to make capital out of it, in revenge for my ribald laughter over Alice's little *contretemps* in the river; but Mr. Blisset and Mr. Scott refused to look upon my fall as an inglorious one, and even complimented me upon the dexterity with which it was managed.

We were soon in the saddle again, and before long we reached Ravnegjá. We decided

that, although we had ascended this steep pass the day before upon our ponies, it would be rash to descend it in like manner ; so we dismounted, and led them down into the sunken plain. At about eight o'clock, we drew near to our desecrated little church, which by this time had become quite home-like, and found our tent pitched just outside the door, the ponies unloaded, and our dinner in the course of preparation.





CHAPTER V.

THE SPLIT IN THE CAMP

IT was some time before the Reads appeared. I spent the interval within the tent at my toilet, and emerged quite refreshed and civilized. Poor Alice arrived in the last stage of misery, discomfort, and exhaustion. It was then perfectly clear to all of us that to expect her to ride to Akureyri in time to catch the steamer was utterly useless. It was no longer possible to blind ourselves to the fact that she was quite unfitted for Icelandic travelling, which only abnormally strong and wiry women can endure. My exuberant spirits alone sustained my flesh ; probably, without that moral prop it would have

collapsed as completely as did Alice's. I have always been able to undergo unusual wear and tear as long as I enjoyed myself, although I have probably suffered for it afterwards. If I were bored, my strength failed me at once. It was already the evening of the 5th of August, and the captain of the "Camoens" had warned us that he should arrive at Akureyri on the 12th or 13th at latest, and remain no longer than was necessary to ship his cargo of ponies.

We had about two hundred and fifty miles to go, and only seven days for the journey—seven days of hard riding across a rough country like Iceland, through rivers and across mountains, sleeping anywhere and anyhow, and with a problematical dinner at the end of each day's toil! What a programme for a woman already nearly spent! It reduced Alice to the depths of despair, and she frankly declared that it would be madness for her to attempt it.

The situation being now fully realized, we found that there was nothing left but to break

up our pleasant party. The two young men had arranged to be in England at a certain date, and by sailing in the "*Camoens*" on the 13th they would only just arrive in time. It was therefore decided that they should start for Akureyri the next morning, leaving us to wend our way back to Reykjavik, where the "*Camoens*" was expected again on the 27th of August.

We sat down to dinner in the lowest spirits. We had all been so happy together, that the pleasure of each one seemed to suffer sudden death at the idea of parting. Alice was miserable in being the cause thereof, and Mr. Read was divided between two grievances—concern for his wife, and disappointment at the failure of his projected ride to Akureyri. I dropped furtive tears over my boiled char, and wished I were a man. Girls are so helpless in these predicaments. It was gall and wormwood to me to relinquish the honour and glory of galloping across Iceland; I was enjoying myself to the top of my bent, and it was hard to reconcile

myself all at once to the inevitable. The two others were as dejected and monosyllabic as the rest of us, although they had less ground for complaint.

After our dismal meal we went outside, and wandered down towards the river. The days were growing shorter, and by half-past ten it became quite dark. That night, however, the valley lay dimly revealed in a luminous moonlight, athwart which the mountains flung gaunt black shadows. Chasms and lava-ridges showed phantom-like in the weird light; the wind was asleep, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the splashing of the silvery water at our feet; across the shadowed surface of the lake there lay a gleaming flood of light. How quiet it was! A hush had fallen upon the earth, as though Nature were holding her breath in the night hours, that she might listen to the beating of her passionate heart. I think I shall remember the beauty of that moonlit plain until I die.

The next morning we rose early. It had been arranged that the Reads and I should remain one more day at Thingvalla, to give Alice breathing space before undertaking the horrors of another ride. One of the guides and twelve of the twenty-eight ponies were to remain with us ; for Mr. Read had determined to make some excursions from Reykjavik during the three weeks of our enforced stay there. We scribbled a few hasty notes, to be posted by our friends on landing in Scotland, and were exchanging farewell speeches, when Gudmunsen announced that two of the best ponies were lost ; and that, as they belonged to the pack destined for Akureyri, the start must be postponed till the next day, when it was hoped that the guides would have hunted up the missing animals. This dilemma is one to which travellers are constantly exposed ; for the guides are apt to be very careless in securing the ponies, who break loose in the night, and stray for miles. This delay was not so very disastrous ; for Mr.

Blisset and Mr. Scott could easily make up for lost time by quick riding.

It was a glorious morning, so warm and bright, that we spread our shawls on the grassy slopes behind the church, and basked in the sunshine, talking and laughing in a deliciously lazy way for some time. Then Mr. Read and Mr. Scott went off to fish and shoot. Towards one o'clock, we drones began to feel hungry ; so I suggested a meal of coffee, black bread, and country butter, all of which I fetched from the farmhouse. Country butter in Iceland, by the way, has the appearance of tallow-candle grease, and is aptly called *smjör* ("smear") ; but the flavour is inoffensive.

Thus fortified, we set off for a long walk across the plain. It was not a particularly easy undertaking ; for the rocks and boulders of lava, to say nothing of gaping chasms, made it difficult to pick one's steps. But oh ! the beauty of it ! A smiling summer day ; sunshine gleaming on the heather-spangled valley, lurking in the

hollows of the mountains, floating on the ripples of the lake, and flooding the stainless sky—sunshine everywhere. A canopy of milk-white clouds hung over the hills, waiting till the sun, in parting, should steep them in crimson and gold; breezes sweet with the breath of flowers, swept in our faces as we wandered idly over the silent plain, which will bear for ever on its face the scars of its tortured past. We sat by the blue fringes of the lake, and watched the sleepy heaving of the water as it broke against the lava islands that thrust their rugged heads beyond reach of the waves.

Then we sauntered on again, and crossing to the skirts of the plain, we mounted the inner rampart of lava, and listened to the fall of the river Öxará. There is to me great fascination in the noise and movement of water, and I could hardly tear myself from the spot. Before returning to the church, we climbed for the last time the narrow platform of the Lögberg, and sitting on those stones, which are every one of

them a history, we let our eyes linger on the funeral fires that the sun had lighted in the sky, where the dying daylight was slowly burning away.

Then we wended our way back, and found that the others had returned before us, and dinner was the order of the day. That disposed of, we loitered in the enclosure outside the church and chatted. We were determined that our last evening together should be lively, so each one aired his own pet story, and we made merry exceedingly. Before turning in, we examined a large rough stone standing close to the church door. On it was traced the exact ell measure of Iceland. When the first church was built at Thingvalla, this stone formed part of its wall. The ancient building was destroyed in a storm, and another erected in its stead, which probably shared the same fate, for the present church is a modern affair, and speaks very little for the progress of architecture in Iceland.

The next morning proved as lovely as the previous one. Our mirth of the night before had evaporated, and we packed in solemn silence. The ponies were assembled, and we looked our last on the ill-used little church, and on the picture of the outraged saints, who still wriggled in dislocated attitudes over the dingy altar. We mounted without any of our usual noisy clamour and laughter, and rode soberly down to the brink of the river. Then came the last words, and looks, and hand-clasps. So, in the morning sunshine, and on the scene of one of nature's mighty convulsions, we parted, and each went his way. It was a strange and romantic spot in which to turn aside from one another, very different from those which generally witness our farewells. We were all moving away, some south, some north; and in a few more moments, the place which had held us united would see our faces *never again*. I was the first to cross the river and mount the rocks. One more long look at the others speed-

ing along the valley, a waving of hands, a faint shout, and all was over. The lava crags towered between us.

I rode alone up the chasm and on to the table-land above. This gained, I broke into a gallop, and tried to work off in violent exercise the irritating sensation of defeat that our frustrated expedition caused me. After a time I pulled up, fearful of losing the track, and waited till I saw Alice jogging along on her patient beast. She had returned joyfully to her first pony, whose dejected air bore witness to its hopeless frame of mind. I was riding a new animal, a splendid one to go, but terribly rough. He always kept well to the fore, and would allow none of the other ponies to pass him. This ambitious spirit exactly tallied with my own, for sober riding pleased me not.

Mr. Read soon joined me, with his gun strapped across his shoulder, and before we had gone many miles he took it into his head to kill something. Some ptarmigan crossed our path

just at that moment, and he went off in full pursuit. Meanwhile, Alice and I dismounted, and rested on a damp and windy moor. For lack of more cheerful matter, we descanted on our gloomy prospects. What should we do for three weeks in Reykjavik? The idea of making fresh expeditions found no favour in Alice's sight; absolute stagnation seemed preferable to her. The sportsman returned after half an hour, but his spoil was small, for most of the wary birds had eluded him, and hidden in the crevices of the rocks. He had, however, shot one ptarmigan and a plover.

By this time our meagre pack had overtaken us, so we were soon on the move again. I dashed on ahead, having determined to encourage no more delays, and did *avant courier* to the cavalcade, until we reached the narrow river-threaded valley where we had halted on our first day's ride. Here, it being already five o'clock, we *lunched*—a laconic trio, waited on by one miserable guide. I don't think any of

us relished our reduced circumstances. The others had naturally carried off all the provisions for their journey to the north, but they had doled us out sufficient for our mid-day meal, and did the thing quite handsomely in the matter of beef. Unfortunately, we were so tired of the sight of our old friend, that we did not do justice to their liberality.

It was then agreed that Mr. Read and I should push on, without further loss of time, to Reykjavik, and seek for lodgings, leaving Alice to potter after us with the pack. Gudmunsen had given us the address of a house where he believed we should find accommodation. We galloped almost the entire way, and reached our destination in the dusk. As I rode down the hill, and came in sight of the governor's glaring white house, I felt akin to tears. Visions of the odoriferous hotel, and the *ennui* of life about Reykjavik, sent my heart sinking into my boots. When one has just ridden forty miles, and is tired and rather under-fed, it does not take

much pressure to set the feminine water-works in play.

We soon found our way to the house of which we were in search. It proved to be a neat little building, painted grey, and situated close to the lake at the back of the town. I scrambled off my pony, and entered a fresh sitting-room, scrupulously neat and clean, with pots of brilliant geraniums in the windows, which were draped with muslin curtains. After the dirt and confusion of our camp life, this trim little place seemed a lap of luxury. I revelled in an arm-chair, whilst Mr. Read made the necessary arrangements with the lady of the house—a pleasant, elderly person—and her tall, handsome daughter.

The latter spoke a little English, and proved remarkably quick in understanding what we had to say. This was all the greater credit to her, since she had had small opportunity of cultivating our language; for although on two former occasions her mother had received English

people into the house, their stay was scarcely long enough to warrant much progress. It was finally settled that the sitting-room should be given up entirely to our use, as well as the two bedrooms above. We were to pay a pound a day, which sum should include our board and all extras, except wine.

This business discussion concluded, we were supplied with biscuits and some delicious coffee. It was served in a shining coffee-pot fastened upon a little stand to match filled with hot cinders. I felt positively overawed by the unwonted profusion of silver and glass, to say nothing of clean table-linen and napkins. Under these soothing influences depression vanished and my cup of content began to fill. We are but material creatures after all, and the restoration of exhausted tissues has an immense effect upon our souls.

I awaited Alice's arrival with impatience, and, when at last I saw her plodding gloomily after the pack, I ran out and met her at the gate.

"Come in," cried I enthusiastically, "this is paradise!"

And so it seemed to her after all that she had gone through. About an hour later our dinner was ready. It was quite a fashionable repast, and comprised three courses—salmon, meat, and sweets. It wound up with coffee and thick cream, after which we felt at peace with the world in general. Then we were shown our bedrooms, which, though extremely primitive and scantily furnished, were very clean. We soon retired, and, for the first time for some days, undressed like Christians and lay upon decent couches. The relief was wonderful, and, as I stretched my tired limbs in the fresh cool sheets I thought without envy of the two dauntless travellers huddled together on the bare ground under their scant little tent, weary, and possibly hungry after a wretched dinner. Theirs was surely the glory, but mine the comfort, and, at that moment, I was base enough to prefer my ignominious lot.



CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT TOWN.

THE next day was spent by Alice and myself in complete and delightful idleness. Mr. Read went off to the river Laxa, about four miles from the town, on the Thingvalla track. He had obtained leave to fish there from our little Danish friend, Mr. Thomsen, the storekeeper, who owned the preserves for some way up the stream. Alice and I pottered out in the afternoon as far as the store, where we sat on the counter and chatted with Mr. Thomsen. We went ostensibly to buy a pot in which to brew our precious little store of tea. The shop was full of ungainly-looking men of

the lower orders. They all had shock heads and huge chignons over each ear. Some wore shaggy masses of hair down to their shoulders. Their figures—a combination of sloping shoulders, long bodies and short legs—were not handsome, and all their movements extremely awkward. Icelandic working-men have no national dress. They wear wide trousers, of cloth, or tarpaulin, and rough jackets. The educated and well-to-do dress in ordinary European style, a little out of date.

The next few days were entirely devoid of incident. Alice and I both suffered from the reaction due to our abnormal exertions up country. All our energy seemed to have been expended, and we could not muster up a fresh supply without some motive power. Having twelve ponies doing nothing we made it a matter of conscience to ride every day, but the tracks round Reykjavik are anything but interesting, and an objectless constitutional on a jogging animal is not calculated to rouse

excitement in even the most inflammable mind.

Our plan of making a tour in the south-west country, and returning to Reykjavik about the 26th or 27th inst., remained as sketchy as when the subject was first mooted. Alice scouted the bare idea, and her husband did not care to go without her. He devoted his time to sport. Esau was an amateur compared to Mr. Read, who fast lost his own individuality and came to be looked upon by his wife and myself merely as fishmonger and poulterer to our establishment. Almost every time he went to the Laxá river he caught thirty pounds of salmon trout, many of them weighing four pounds. Worms were the only bait; the gaudy fly only seemed to scare those unsophisticated little fishes.

Mr. Read took the first opportunity of returning to the moor on the way to Thingvalla, called Skallafell, where he had seen the flock of ptarmigan; but, after wandering for miles to no

purpose, he only succeeded in bringing down a raven, eight plovers, and two curlews. The ptarmigan had taken themselves off to safer quarters. Mr. Read was accompanied by our guide, one named Guðni, aged about twenty, with an ever-ready and perfectly unmeaning smile, a large, thickly-freckled face, and an indescribable figure. He was very good-natured, but not prepossessing. He had sole charge of our twelve ponies, and a great nuisance we found this extensive stable, for we were quite unable to keep them properly exercised, and they cost about a pound a day. Mr. Read began to cast about for a means of getting rid of them, for since our expedition still remained in embryo, we had absolutely no use for them. We consoled ourselves with grumbling at Gudmunsen, who had saddled us with them for a month.

Several of the *élite* of Reykjavik came to call upon us; amongst others, a young man, named Jonsen, the manager of a rival "store" to Mr. Thomsen's. He had been in a merchant's office

in London, and spoke English perfectly. He invited Mr. Read to ride with him to inspect a farm belonging to his father-in-law, situated on the other side of the fiord, on a level tract of land running between the base of the mountain and the sea. This was to be let or sold, and the rent asked was £50 a year. Mr. Read went, nothing loth, to occupy his empty days, and found the farm capable of containing, in summer, a stock of a thousand sheep and twenty cows, with about a dozen ponies to do the fetching and carrying. Mr. Jonsen could not tell the exact extent of the farm, but Mr. Read judged it to be about 1,000 acres, or thereabouts, and described it as the greenest spot he had seen in Iceland. All round Reykjavik the grass is very scarce and poor. The farm stretched up the hills on one side, and down to the sea on the other, where there was a harbour deep enough for ships of any tonnage to lie and take in cargo.

Mr. Read's speculative imagination was

fired, and he was convinced that if a scheme were set on foot for farming sheep and shipping them to the British market, no better place than this spot could be found for the purpose. Nothing would be easier than to drain it, which alone would be a great improvement. The farmhouse appeared altogether undesirable, even to our enthusiast, it being undeniably dirty, ill-savoured, and poky. Mr. Jonsen's father-in-law had advertised the place extensively in the Scotch papers, but without success. No daring capitalist was forthcoming to sink his money in Icelandic mutton.

Dr. Hjaltalin, the well-known medical and scientific writer, had discovered a limestone rock half way up a mountain behind the farm. But although the want of lime is much felt in Iceland, this find is of little use, for the expense of bringing the lime down on ponies is so great as to swallow up all possible profits. The stupendous difficulty of making roads and facilitating locomotion is the great stumbling-block

to Icelandic commerce. There is no such thing as traffic ; everything has to be carried by ponies at great cost, delay, and labour.

During these idle days we were able to study the natives. Icelanders are certainly not a handsome race—indeed, rather the reverse—for their faces, although open and honest-looking, are devoid of all animation—in fact, decidedly heavy. Their hair is almost universally of a dull tow colour, and their eyes very pale blue. Their *morale* is a reflex of their minds, for as a rule the people are entirely without vivacity, enthusiasm, or energy. The national apathy is doubtless due to the inactive lives Icelanders are obliged to lead, shut up in their spare little houses during the long and severe winter. The geographical position of their country cuts them off for months together from all intercourse with the outer world, and at the best of times communication is uncertain and scanty.

Thus, being out of reach of the movement

and progress of civilized lands, they are thrown back upon themselves, and lead a dead-alive existence, filled with the humdrum common-places of their monotonous days. Even when Icelanders *do* hear of the stirring events that are taking place daily in Europe, they are scarcely interested or impressed by them. Such doings present no parallel to their minds, being outside the pale of their experience and imagination.

But, in spite of the stagnation in which they are plunged, Icelanders are undoubtedly thoughtful, persevering, and studious. They spend the winter in poring over books, and storing up in their minds what learning they can gather; they are passionately devoted to their own beautiful Sagas and legends; they set great value also on foreign literature, and are very quick in picking up languages. Many of the prominent men amongst them have travelled, and instead of abandoning their own wretched country for a more prosperous one, they invariably return, with their patriotic feel-

ings intensified by a burning desire to restore their northern island to more than its ancient glory.

But what is to be done? Iceland is a desert, devastated and contorted by fire. Roads there are none, and the tracks are not capable of being traversed even by the roughest of waggons. As I said before, ponies are the only means of locomotion ; for the natives have no steamers of their own to go round the island, calling at the different ports. Their very trade in fish, sheep, and ponies, is crippled for lack of proper business establishments ; and yet, with energy, and a little capital to start with, there is a rich field for profit in all three.

Such a thing as a bank does not exist in all Iceland. Provisions and necessaries of every description come from Denmark, and are proportionately dear. Denmark has no money to spare in improving her colony, and Iceland is too poor and too apathetic to do much for herself. There is no society, in our sense of the

word, although a few dinners and balls take place in the course of the year. This is easily accounted for. The women are very inferior to the men, and their social standing consequently of small importance. They bring in the coffee when one goes to call, and wait upon their visitors like servants, their husbands meanwhile doing all the conversation and entertaining. Of course, there are some bright exceptions to this rule, but they are few.

The typical Scotchman who requires a surgical operation for the mental digestion of a joke is wildly hilarious and jocose compared to the typical Iceland. The latter can never be made to understand that one can laugh *with* him without laughing *at* him. He is very sensitive and depressingly matter-of-fact. However, taking into consideration his irredeemable disadvantages of country and climate, he is much to be commended for his unwearying patience, patriotism, and thirst for learning.

We were particularly fortunate in our landlady, Mrs. Schulessen, and her daughter Fanny. The latter soon became a great favourite with us. She waited on us entirely, and was always thoughtful, obliging, and gentle. Her English improved rapidly, for we taught her several words and sentences which she learnt at once, and never forgot. She was undeniably the best looking girl we had seen in Iceland. She had the usual blue eyes and fair hair of her country, but her smile was bright and her manner full of animation; she thoroughly enjoyed fun, and had a strong sense of the ridiculous.

She and her mother were particularly clean and neat, and kept the house like a new pin, with the aid of one servant. They were evidently well-to-do and superior people. Mrs. Schulessen was a widow, and her only child besides Fanny was an intelligent boy about twelve years of age; a little girl four years old, named Helga, whom Mrs. Schulessen had adopted, completed the family party. I must explain, by the way,

à propos of Helga, that it is quite the usual thing for Icelanders to adopt children, and bring them up amongst their sons and daughters, making no difference between the strangers and their own flesh and blood.

Helga was the child of a very poor peasant living miles away in the interior; she was a pretty little thing, but had a most uproarious temper, and got everything her own way by shrieking whenever she was opposed. She was filled with loathing and terror of us, and no amount of coaxing and bribing would remove the bad impression we had unconsciously made on her mistrustful mind. Fanny explained that the child imagined we would carry her away with us to Scotland; and certainly whenever we heard her roaring and fighting in the room next to ours, we had only to open the door and look in; she would dash out of the house screaming as if she were pursued by the Fiend himself! This we found was the best mode of ridding ourselves of her turbulent presence, and we

constantly adopted it when we heard a scuffle going on.

I love children, and they generally love me, so I was sorry that little Helga was not to be won over. A more implacable little heart than hers does not beat—as far as foreigners are concerned.

The first Sunday after our return to Reykjavik we were taken by Fanny to divine service, and this was a good opportunity of noting the absence of zeal and earnestness in Icelanders. The large church being still under repair, the congregation had to put up with the little one on the hill, round which the cemetery lies. We entered the sacred building shortly before twelve o'clock, and found it already nearly full. We were led by Fanny to a bench near the altar, and from that point of vantage we contemplated the surroundings and our fellow-worshippers. Immediately in front of us stood a harmonium at which was seated a burly man. Outside I fancied I heard the continual braying of a much

exasperated donkey, but I soon discovered that it was the ringing of the bell which called the laggards to a sense of their duty ; it was certainly the most astonishing bell I ever heard.

People kept flocking in at the door, and we were soon packed like so many human sardines. The women were, many of them, dressed in the holiday costume of the country, which is made in the same style as the work-a-day clothes, only with the addition of a coloured embroidery round the edge of the skirt, and beautiful gold and silver work on the body. This is made by the wearer herself. A silver gilt belt is worn round the waist, and on the head a white erection like a helmet ; the framework is covered with white linen, and fastened on the brows with a silver gilt crown — over the whole falls a white tulle veil. This head-dress is very picturesque and quaint, but scarcely becoming, and I can imagine nothing more inconvenient in a high wind !

I sat and marvelled at the absence of good

looks in both sexes, and at the garments of the men. Such coats and trousers, far be it from me to describe. They were certainly fearfully and wonderfully made. I looked in vain for Madame Finsen ; none of the governor's family were present, nor indeed any of the upper ten. Even Mr. and Mrs. Pjetturssen were conspicuous by their absence; the fair Thora, I was told, had gone into the country.

And all this time the bell was braying away outside, and inside noises smote the ear that made us feel very ill. These proceeded from the zeal with which the congregation to a man began to clear its throat, preparatory to raising its voice in prayer. I shuddered, and felt thankful for my short skirts and sheltered position between the Reads.

At last the Dean arrived, and made his way quickly to the altar, upon which lay what appeared to be a heap of clothes, flanked on either side by an over-grown candle of sickly hue. Here he was joined by a secular-looking

person, who proceeded to dress him up under the very noses of the congregation. First, he was invested with a white surplice, and over that was fastened an old red velvet cope, embroidered with a cross. He already wore a cassock and ruffles, so by this time he was completely adorned, and his valet turned him over to the altar with manifest pride. This little ceremony over, the Dean knelt down and cleared his throat with a vigour to which the efforts of the congregation were faint and puny. A spittoon for his especial use desecrated the altar.

Then the burly man at the harmonium struck up a hymn—each note of which took one minute—and the congregation lifted up its voice and sang. Neither the vocal nor instrumental performances were excruciatingly bad, but wanted sadly in delicacy and finish, as also in fervour. The hymn lasted a very long time, and had only two motives; when at last it had drawn to a close, the valet, or clerk, as he turned

out to be, came to the fore again, and, standing in front of the altar, chanted something that sounded as if he were complaining bitterly. He was very funny in appearance, and his figure, which defied all accepted rules, was nobly revealed by his round cut-away jacket.

Then came the Dean's turn, and he likewise chanted very dismally, but his share in the service seemed to be small and unimportant, for he was speedily silenced by the hymn which again monopolized our attention for fifteen minutes. By this time the church had become hot and insufferably highly scented, so just as the Dean was preparing to get in another word edgeways between the clerk and the harmonium player, we hurried thankfully into the open air.

Alice had improved the shining hour by privately making a sketch of the reverend gentleman's back view, and I by taking in details for my diary, and upsetting the equilibrium of a small child near me whose fascinated gaze I riveted. We lingered in the

churchyard for some time, and found it crowded with people, who passed continually in and out of the building and hung round the door. When they had refreshed themselves with conversation and smoke, they returned in a perfectly stolid and business-like manner to their devotions.

As for myself, I felt quite conscience-stricken at my flippant mood. But, indeed, I could not feel that I had taken part in the worship of God. First of all, I had not understood a word that was said, as the service was naturally carried on in Icelandic, and the demeanour of those who were listening to their native tongue suggested so little religious fervour, or even respect, that I found it impossible to realize that I was in church at all. The whole thing was more like a comic piece of acting than anything else.

Some time afterwards we were shown the Roman Catholic chapel on the hill. It has been out of use for several years. The last priest, although he spent twenty years in Reykjavik,

never succeeded in making a single proselyte, so the mission was discontinued.

In the afternoon of that day we paid some visits, none of them very lively, for the ladies were shy, and seemed to look upon the mere form of shaking hands as a deception and a snare. Later on we were taken by Mr. Jonsen to see the Museum of Antiquities. This collection is kept in two rooms in the prison-house—a happy combination of art and vice! Here we were shown some bones, some ancient carvings, silver ornaments, needlework, old church-decorations, a pulpit, a font, drinking-horns, and other miscellaneous articles, none of them particularly beautiful, but undoubtedly curious.

So, with such harmless excitements as sight-seeing, church-going, and visits, we kept the even tenour of our ways. We found ourselves fast relapsing into the listless state of the natives, for we had nothing to do. We had no work or books, save two or three works on Iceland, which we almost knew by heart, for we were

only provided with those bare necessities that were requisite for our ride to the north, never having anticipated the dismal failure of that expedition. Alice spent her time sketching ; but as the scenery round Reykjavik did not suggest much to her, she laboured at her pictures with a discontented spirit. I scribbled away at my diary, and kept up a running fire of rather aimless conversation with the Reads. Mr. Read, when he was not fishing or shooting, was drawing out the Reykjavik "club men," who soon began to look upon him as a man and a brother.

On Monday, August 11, the sun, which up to then had been a faithful friend, got tired of us and our hum-drum ways, and withdrew his patronage. At twelve o'clock we mounted our ponies, and, escorted by Guðni, we rode to Hafnarjörd, a fishing village on the coast, about seven miles from Reykjavik. We learnt for the first time the ghastly effect of Icelandic scenery without the softening influence of sunshine. We rode through dreary wastes washed

by a sullen grey sea : there was not one streak of colour nor one gleam of light to be seen around us.

Hafnarjörd itself stood on the shore of the fiord—a long, straggling line of houses facing the sea, and flanked by towering masses of lava. It was a second-rate Reykjavik in style ; the same wooden buildings, only smaller, less trim, and fewer of them. We were met by a Scotchman, named Patterson, who was employed in superintending the working of sulphur-pits near Hafnarjörd. He invited us to the house of an Icelandic couple with whom he lived, where we were promptly regaled with coffee.

Mr. Patterson had been nearly two years in Iceland, during which time he had developed a more apathetic frame of mind than the least ambitious native. He told us that he enjoyed the utterly uneventful life he led ; that he cared nothing for the outer world, and that he could not go to the trouble of reading the English

newspapers, even when he did get them—and I imagine that was seldom. He assured me that he would be quite content to spin out the remainder of his days at Hafnarjörd. I was simply appalled by these views. No one who has not been there can form the slightest conception of the deadly dullness of that little fishing-village, and yet here was a man, born to better things, who revelled in it!

This degenerate Scotchman had even adopted the shoes of the country, which are mere squares of skin sewn up at each end. When made, they are thoroughly soaked in water, and put on the feet wet, so that they may at once assume the needful form; they are then lined in the sole with flannel.

Mr. Patterson told us that Icelandic sulphur, when dug out of the pits, contains eighty-five per cent. of the pure article; and that, but for the lack of proper roads, these pits would pay very well. We were shown specimens of sulphur, and, having wandered about the town for

about half an hour, we mounted our ponies and returned to Reykjavik.

We made a curious acquaintance at Reykjavik in the shape of a lady who shall be nameless for obvious reasons. She was the wife of a highly respectable Icелander, who did *not* reside in his native island. She had the wit to persuade Alice and Mr. Blisset into the purchase of certain silver ornaments on the first day of our arrival, plying us with coffee and exaggerated compliments the while. She insisted on saving us the trouble of going to the shop, and despatched her maid to fetch the articles she was so anxious we should buy. The whole transaction was carried out in her salon; she told us the price, and received the money. Next day she sped us on our journey, never expecting to see us again.

But fate decreed otherwise. We did return to Reykjavik, and one morning, having nothing particular to do, we strolled into the silversmith's shop, and found similar articles to those in

which we had invested, at from twelve to sixty per cent. cheaper.

For some time we suppressed our discovery, and responded as best we could to the florid compliments of our nameless friend. But there came a day when her prolixity in conversation added fuel to the flame, and an animated explanation was the result. The lady contradicted herself half-a-dozen times, and then waxed angry. Alice regained nothing that she had lost, but hardly grudged the money, for it brought us much excitement and a large fund of conversation. We naturally dropped the lady's acquaintance, for one cannot be expected to keep up enthusiasm for a friend who receives you with open arms and cheats you into the bargain.

However, during the time that intervened between our return and the final *exposé*, we were a good deal thrown with the nameless one—or rather she threw herself a good deal upon us. She was a strange-looking female, and

given to an ambitious style of dress. If any-one could have induced her to comb her front hair, and curl the yellow feather in her bonnet, it might have been an improvement; but I fancy that nobody dared to make the suggestion. One day she came to call upon us in a particularly grotesque costume, and informed us, in her usual adulatory language, that *she* had been looked upon as the representative of the fashionable world, until we arrived and eclipsed her glory. Our old serge dresses and felt hats were but sorry rivals to feathers and laces, but we were not jealous-minded, nor anxious to emulate her style.

The nameless one being of irreproachable antecedents, was intimate with all the *élite* of Reykjavik, and as she was prudent enough not to victimize her own country people, they knew nothing of her hospitable little ways with strangers. We were taken by her one afternoon to see Mrs. Thorberg, the Bishop's married daughter, whose husband is the sub-governor

under the Danish chief. They lived in a house on the hill, just above that occupied by the Finsens. We passed through a library into a sitting-room, where Mrs. Thorberg received us. She was a pleasant likeness of her sister Thora, and was quietly and becomingly dressed in European fashion. She gave me the impression of having much more refinement and education than any Icelandic lady I had yet met. She spoke English beautifully, and entertained us with perfect ease and composure, talking with intelligent *naïveté* on different subjects.

She showed us her two children—a boy and a girl, both pretty little things, but very shy. The girl fled at once, but the boy remained, but obstinately resisted all my overtures. Mr. Thorberg, a decidedly handsome man, soon joined us, and made himself most agreeable. His English was not nearly so good as that of his wife, but he made up for it by speaking French. After awhile the table was spread by a neat

maid in native costume, and we drank tea by way of a change, and ate various cakes, all served in handsome silver baskets. We came away much pleased with our new friends: they were undoubtedly a very nice couple.

In those days we saw a good deal of old Dr. Hjaltalin, and also of the well-known and much-esteemed Matthias Jochumsson, the editor of the Reykjavik newspaper. Mr. Jochumsson is a political writer of great mark, to say nothing of his being Poet Laureate of Iceland; not content with the productions of his own fertile pen, he has translated "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" into his native language. He took a great fancy to us, and presented me with a copy of "Hamlet." He also put us all into the newspaper, where we figured as the Alpha and Omega of the fashionable arrivals. Mr. Read was described as an "Englishman of wealth," and I as the granddaughter of a celebrated French author. This last statement was not quite correct, but as

it had a certain family likeness to the truth, I did not argue the point.

About ten days after our return to Reykjavik, we sent nine out of our twelve ponies back to the places whence they were borrowed by Gudmunsen. Three we were obliged to keep, as Guðni vowed he did not know where to find the owners. We imagined that this was a *ruse* on his part, for his neck loved the yoke of groomdom. Our three steeds were splendid animals, with broken spirits and a bad sore on each back, so naturally we could not ride them for some little time.

I must not forget to mention one important item in our day's programme. Every morning the Reads went off to take their baths at the Leprosy Hospital round the corner. I did not profit by this privilege, as I discovered, when taken to see the arrangements, that the room devoted to ablutions was the very head quarters of distasteful odours. I therefore contented myself with my tub at home. But Alice had

begun to look upon smells as part of her existence in Reykjavik, and was ready to endure them with fortitude for the sake of her bath.





CHAPTER VII.

EXCURSIONS AND DISSIPATIONS.

WE were anxious to make an excursion to Videy Island, situated half way across the bay, and where eider ducks are bred. We had some difficulty in procuring a boat with any pretensions to be considered safe. It is a curious fact that in Iceland, where the people live almost entirely on fish, the boats are of the frailest and most worthless description, and the men have not a notion of rowing or managing them.

It was about twelve o'clock when we shoved off from the landing-stage, in a boat that inspired us with little confidence. It was very low in the water, very dirty, and, worse still, it

leaked ; however, the sea was perfectly smooth and the sky clear.

The owner went with us, as also did Guðni, who pulled an oar. There was no kind of co-operation between the two ; in fact, one hindered the other, so it was about an hour before we reached the island. We landed, and made our way to its only house, inhabited by an Iclander, named Stephensen, the proprietor of the eider ducks, whose down he sells at twelve shillings per pound. Mr. Read, still cleaving to some remnant of etiquette, brought a letter of introduction to Mr. Stephensen ; but it availed him nothing, for the eider duck farmer was away, and only his little daughter forthcoming to entertain us. She was very amiable, and presented us with an Icelandic delicacy called "skyr," made with sour cream, and eaten with sugar. We had tasted it at Thingvalla, and as it had not taken our fancy, we refrained from indulging in it again.

We sallied out to see the eider ducks' nests,

but found none of the birds sitting, so we resolved to take to our boat again. Of course, with Guðni at the helm, it was nowhere to be seen when wanted, and we had to clamber over endless rocks and hillocks, and felt very tired and cross before we succeeded in finding it. At last we got away and crossed to the further side of the bay. We were in search of a small river, where good fishing was to be had ; this we were told flowed into a fiord opening out of the bay. We entered the fiord and found it endless. The men rowed on and on, whilst we sat on a narrow board like the back of a knife, with our feet in contorted positions, to keep them out of the water at the bottom of the boat. We thought the trip most unpleasant, but we persevered in our search—still no river.

“An eruption has swallowed it up, most likely,” said I, hopelessly ; “these little disturbances are all in the day’s work in Iceland.”

However, after a wearisome time we even-

tually found our river, but it was then too late for sport, so we turned homewards.

A wind sprang up and the waves became boisterous; our cockle-shell pitching terribly, and causing us much uneasiness. Alice sat huddled up, mistrustfully eyeing the sea and waves, and quoting statistics out of Burton's "Ultima Thule," which prove that owing to Icelandic fishermen's ignorance of navigation, one-fourth of the population is drowned every year! These facts were not reassuring, but Alice's despairing face would have provoked laughter from one at his last gasp.

We were *hours* getting out of the fiord, and when in the open bay, the waves and wind rose rougher than ever. This being the case, we thought it more prudent to go on shore and walk home, for the boat was quite unfit to weather a storm. Having repassed Videy Island we made for the main-land, abandoned our wretched skiff, and set off on foot, experiencing to the full the misery of walking in

Iceland. The rocks and mounds hurt our feet and twisted our ankles, and we exerted ourselves more over *one* mile than we should in England over six.

The rain, which had begun to fall when we were on the water, ceased suddenly, and the clouds were torn, revealing rifts of light. Gleams of sunshine illuminated the base of the mountains across the bay, whilst the sun itself was quite hidden by the swiftly-shifting mists and clouds that rolled over the heights; flashes of pure green colour lay across the sea, which tossed grey and black in the shadows. The whole picture was far more wonderful and delicate than when the sky was cloudless and a universal sunshine reigning. So we trudged home, feeling very tired, very hungry, and very determined not to go out boating again in a hurry.

The next day, Alice and I rode on our halt and maimed steeds to see some hot-springs about three miles out of the town. Alice insisted

upon a pace that would have seemed slow to a funeral hack ; she prated a good deal about the ponies' backs, but I fancy it was a case of two for herself and one for her animal. The hot-springs were just like any other springs, except that the water was boiling ; they were nothing at all in the style of the Geysers. Guðni accompanied us, egging on his pony in the usual Icelandic fashion of flapping the legs violently against its sides.

He spoke English very well, considering he had had so few advantages, and sometimes came out with a speech, the correctness of which startled us, such as, "I will make an incision," *apropos* of the ponies' swollen backs. But on the other hand, if we asked him the simplest question, he smiled, and understood nothing. He could not even discriminate between an inquiry and a statement, and replied "Yes" in every case, or changed the subject, and demanded information about England.

This was amusing at first, but it irritated us

after a time. Guðni was very stupid in most things. He could do nothing for the ponies' backs, in spite of his proffers of "incisions"—he could guide Mr. Read to no spot where shooting was to be had, and he understood nothing that we said to him until we had shouted it in half-a-dozen different forms. I soon gave up wrestling in speech with him, but Alice still persevered. True, she would ask questions of a mummy if no more animated companion were available.

One day, on our return from a very dull ride, we found Madame Olufa Finsen and Mr. Read sitting together in most friendly wise. She had called to invite us to luncheon the next day; she was astonishingly nervous, and when we entered the room she seemed doubtful whether to welcome or be welcomed by us. We accepted her invitation, and did our best to reassure her, so that she took her departure quite calmed and soothed.

That afternoon we spent sitting on different

door-steps, taking sketches of different houses in the town—or, rather, Alice sketched, and I looked on. The Bishop's house, Government House, the college—all were faithfully portrayed. Meanwhile, some people grouped round and told me, in good nervous Icelandic, that I was a beautiful girl (*Falleg stúlka*). I had become quite accustomed to these panegyrics, and knew the phrase by heart from gentle and simple, acquaintances and strangers. I was the reigning beauty of Reykjavik, and had no rivals. "*Dans le royaume des aveugles les borgnes sont rois !*"

The next morning, at a quarter past one, we went to Government House. There we found a collection of Icelandic matrons, all arrayed in their best. The nameless one was there, and her appearance quite staggered me for a moment. She was *decolletée*, to begin with, and her cap bristled with pink roses ; blue ribbons floated indiscriminately from all parts of her person, and her front hair had outdone itself.

Mrs. Thorberg, on the contrary, looked very nice. The chief professor's wife, whom we already knew, was also present, as well as a Mrs. Magnusson, a stranger to us. This lady's husband is a librarian at Cambridge.

We all sat round a table, and partook of chocolate and cakes—both excellent, and the latter in divers forms and great profusion. Poor Mr. Read seemed lost amongst so many women ; and if there are two things he particularly dislikes, they are chocolate and cakes ; he gulped them down manfully, nevertheless. Madame Finsen was very kind and hospitable. After our meal, she showed us pictures of her grown-up children at Copenhagen. The married daughter is evidently very pretty.

By-and-by the governor came in, and some champagne was served. This he poured out himself, and we all drank in solemn silence, bowing ceremoniously to one another. We then took our leave.

Time went on, and the date of the "Ca-

moens' " return began to grow comparatively near. She was due on the 27th August; and, alas! on the 21st inst. we were told that there had been a change of plan, and she could not possibly arrive before the 2nd or 3rd September. This unwelcome news we heard from some English people who had landed at Akureyri on the 13th, and ridden across Iceland to Reykjavik. They had all seen our friends, Mr. Blisset and Mr. Scott, who arrived in good time, and none the worse for their expedition.

In spite of our determination never to go boating again, we were weak enough to trust ourselves in another Icelandic cockleshell, not many days after our trip to Videy Island and wild-goose chase after the river. Our destination this time was Bessastadir, a large farm across the fiord, belonging to Mr. Grimer Thomsen, the Vice-President of the Althing, and one of the principal men in Reykjavik. Accompanied by Fanny and her little brother, we set off across the water; Alice and I perched upon

the narrow seats like a pair of badly-trussed hens. The boat leaked to such an extent, that it began to fill rapidly, and the question arose in our minds whether we should reach the shore before it went down altogether or not. We all spent our energies in baling out the water, whilst the man and boy lazily plied their oars, generally at variance. They were utterly stolid, and seemed as if they did not care whether they drowned us and themselves too. We landed at last, hot with anxiety, and brimful of renewed and solemn oaths to eschew water-parties in future. This time, I think, we kept our word.

We made our way to the farmhouse, a spacious and comfortably-furnished building; for Mr. Grimer Thomsen is well endowed with Icelandic flesh-pots. Unfortunately, he was not at home, but we were hospitably entertained by his wife. After taking refreshments, we visited the church close at hand. This is said to be one of the oldest in Iceland. It is of stone,

and in excellent repair ; better still, it is clean and sweet, being quite free from the unsavoury stores with which Icelandic churches are often crowded.

The pulpit is an amazing work of art, on the panels of which are pictures of the Apostles, looking like exaggerated Nebuchadnezzars after *centuries* of grass. The colouring is particularly brilliant ; but each figure is a gross libel on the "human form divine." These maligned Apostles have enormous shock heads, and deformed feet half the size of their bodies. Icelandic pictures generally provoke more mirth than admiration. I heard of one, to be seen in the country, representing the Virgin Mary in a pair of Icelandic slippers.

In the afternoon the wind rose very high, and we scouted the suicidal idea of returning to Reykjavik in our leaking boat ; being without our ponies, there was nothing for it but to walk home. This alternative did not dishearten us, for we imagined the distance by land to be

nearly four or five miles, instead of which it proved to be nine or ten. We tramped along a rough pony track over rocks and stones, hills and dales—we lost our way, and found it again—we relapsed into melancholy silence and crawled into Reykjavik one after the other like a string of low-spirited geese.

Towards the end of August Parliament was to dissolve, and a farewell banquet to be given at the College. To this feast Mr. Read was bidden, much to his elation—until he bethought himself that he had no proper clothes in which to appear. It must be confessed, that in spite of all his filthy lucre the “Englishman of wealth” was sorely puzzled where to turn for a black coat! He tried the Reykjavik tailor, but nothing at all suitable or well-fitting was to be had. In a moment of brazen despair he assured his friend, Mr. Jochumssen that he intended to go as he was, in his aged well-worn shooting-suit. The poet was scandalized, and placed the whole of his wardrobe at Mr. Read’s disposal rather

than that the banquet should be so disgraced. At last, after much suspense and shame, Mr. Read managed to buy and borrow the requisite articles.

On the day in question, the 24th August, he retired early to his room, accompanied by his wife to act as valet, and at a quarter past five, Alice brought him proudly downstairs. He seemed depressed, but very fine, in a huge pair of borrowed trousers, an inoffensive coat, and an irrepressible dickey that for some time defied all Alice's manœuvres! Mr. Jochumssen came to fetch him, and off he went to the tune of our mocking laughter, hiding his splendour under a large and flowing mantle.

Meanwhile Alice and I had a little dinner-party on our own account. Our guests were Mrs. Thorberg and her sister Thora Pjettursson, who had returned from the country some days before. They were both very pleasant, and we became quite lively and confidential. At about eight o'clock the convivial one returned, bring-

ing in his wake three others straight from the festive board. They were strangers to us, having but lately arrived from Akureyri, where they were landed by the "*Camoens*" on her last voyage. One was the well-known American, Professor Fiske, who is greatly interested in Icelanders and their literature. He has won their esteem by presenting Reykjavik with a collection of books; the national gallery, by-the-bye, is kept in the gallery of the cathedral.

We spent quite a dissipated evening, and our five guests and three selves almost overflowed our skimp little sitting-room. It was a delightful change after the monotony of the past eventless weeks. When our friends had taken leave of us, we lingered outside the house watching the *Aurora Borealis*, whose faint flashes of pale green light swept over the gloom of the evening sky.

Then we began to cross-examine Mr. Read about the banquet. It appeared that there were about forty-two guests, chiefly members of the

Althing. This number included some officers of the French man-of-war then in the harbour, Mr. Fiske, Mr. Read, and one or two other foreigners. Speeches began with the second course, and continued with ever-increasing ardour. They were all in Icelandic, and, as time went on, each one wagged his tongue independently of listeners and apparently for his own special satisfaction. There were two or three speeches going on at the same moment, and no one seemed to pay the least attention. This lack of courtesy provoked no ill-will; on the contrary, for, at last, they all fell to embracing one another enthusiastically. Mr. Read never was so much kissed in all his life, and came home quite gushing. This banquet evidently corresponds with our Greenwich whitebait dinner at the end of the session.



CHAPTER VIII.

LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS.

BEING by this time heartily tired of Reykjavik, and finding that it would be another ten days before we could take our departure, we made up our minds to start upon the much-discussed tour. We were to make our first halt at Krísuvík, about seven hours' ride from the capital; it is celebrated for its sulphur pits, the manager of which had invited us to pass the night at his house. Next day we intended proceeding to Eyrarbakki, and thence to Oddi. By fulfilling this programme we should spend about a week in the saddle, and return to

Reykjavik a couple of days or so before the "Camoens'" return.

Having ere this got rid of the invalid ponies and Guðni, we were obliged to provide ourselves with a fresh stud and guide. Unfortunately we could not secure the services of Zoeger, the best guide in Iceland ; he was at the Geysers with some of the new comers from Akureyri. We had seen a good deal of this man during our stay at Reykjavik, and found him most intelligent, unassuming, and respectful. We were told by others who had employed him, that he was energetic and obliging, in fact, the very perfection of a guide, so we deeply regretted not having taken him in the first instance instead of the highborn Gudmunson. Zoeger acted as guide to the King of Denmark, during his visit to the colony, and gave so much satisfaction that on leaving Iceland the King presented him with a testimonial and a ring.

The only man we could find did not impress us favourably ; he could neither speak nor un-

derstand a word of any language save his own, and his face was destitute of the faintest glimmer of sense. I mistrusted him from the first, and thought quite longingly of the discarded Guðni ; however, I suppressed my misgivings rather than discourage Mr. Read, who was all agog at the thoughts of a little change. We were to be accompanied part of the way by an Englishman who had ridden across from the north, and as his guide appeared intelligent, I trusted that he would impart some of his wits to ours.

At eleven o'clock on the 25th August we all set off, and at the first start my pony behaved very badly. Nothing would induce him to move. I alternately coaxed and beat him, but in vain. At last, after making me hot and ridiculous, he suddenly repented him, and gave me no further cause for complaint until we reached Hafnarjörd. Here we rested for a few minutes, and then remounted our steeds. My pony again refused to stir, and when he did so, contented himself

with backing in and out of a drain. I bore it patiently at first, thinking to humour his strange tastes, and soften him towards me, but after a time I turned and rent him. I had not to punish him long, for without the smallest warning, he ducked his head between his knees, kicked up his heels, and I forsook him! I was not a bit hurt, but my skirt caught in the pummel, and tore from top to bottom. I fancy pony had the best of the "rending" business.

Much abashed, I scrambled to my feet. I hurried to the place where we had called on our previous visit to Hafnarjörd; there my gown was kindly repaired by the lady of the house. Meantime our English friend and his guide went on, leaving us to overtake them. A good deal of time was lost in mending, and a further delay was caused by our host's insisting on our drinking coffee. At last we got away, and I had my saddle changed from the victorious steed to a little black animal with one eye. He

was very ill-favoured, but had easy paces, and unlimited pluck and patience.

Instead of allowing us to follow the track along which the others had disappeared, our guide insisted on our going in another direction, intimating by signs and gestures that it was a short cut, and that we should come up to our friend all the sooner. I rather objected to this, but the Iclander seemed so positive that we gave way and followed where he led. For nearly two hours we rode through narrow valleys, amongst hills covered with dead white mosses, expecting at every moment to see the others ahead—still no sign of them.

We passed at length on to a far-sweeping plain, shut in on the horizon by frowning mountains. The day was cold and grey, and as time wore on, an icy wind swept down upon us from the heights. The scenery was more majestic and more appallingly desolate than anything I had yet seen. We were riding over lava, beneath which the very earth lay crushed and

hidden ; nothing was to be seen but rock and crag stretching away on all sides of us to the base of the lofty mountains. We were perished with cold, and dismounted to put on some extra wraps. So numbed were my fingers, spite of my fur-lined gloves, that I could scarcely fasten my cape.

It was then nearly four o'clock, and the prospect was very dreary, for we were riding straight towards the mountains, which we evidently had to cross. I looked up at their towering peaks, round which the mists were clinging and the angry rain-clouds hurrying, and my heart began to sink. I was not tired, but very chill. When once we began to ascend, every other feeling was merged in profound admiration. I shall never forget the grandeur of those gaunt black mountains, with their crowns of virgin snow. The lower slopes were clothed with mosses of varied hues ; every shade was there, from the most brilliant to the palest green, fading away into the ghastly white of those long dead.

Down came a pitiless icy sleet, that flew straight into our faces, and soaked our veils in a moment. It was wretched to be riding up the mountains at that great height, with no protection from the wind and sleet, but we consoled ourselves by the thought that we could not be far from Krísuvík, where we would soon be housed, and warmed, and fed. With this prospect I managed to keep up a cheerful spirit, and to encourage my brave little one-eyed pony, who scrambled from rock to rock, and over sudden and steep ascents, with a nimbleness that was truly marvellous. I must confess I had qualms now and then, when he skipped along with his blind side turned to the precipice. However, he never once missed his footing, although the track to Thingvalla and the Geysers were as Rotten Row compared to this.

On we went, till we passed some sheds, and arrived soon after at a sulphur pit. This naturally led us to hope that we were quite close to Krísuvík. What was our astonishment when

having gone a little further, the track suddenly ceased. Although somewhat disconcerted, we rode on, hoping to find it again. We appealed to the guide, but he seemed utterly bewildered. He gaped about in an imbecile way, and led us up the mountain sides and down amongst chasms and precipices, to say nothing of large holes twenty feet deep. We were in a small plain, hemmed in by surrounding peaks; large drifts of snow lay in the hollows, and even the mosses had not ventured to so high and bleak a place.

After wandering about for an hour, wet through and shivering, we found that we were hopelessly lost, and the increasing cold and waning light warned us that night was at hand. We thought with joy of the sheds near the sulphur pit, and hastened to return to them. Although they were full of tools, disgustingly dirty, and highly scented, they seemed a haven of rest to us, for without them we should have been prowling about all night, and running all

kinds of risks, from catching cold to breaking our necks.

Luckily we had some wraps with us, and also some provisions, and as we had only taken a cup of coffee at Hafnarjörd since our nine o'clock breakfast, we were rather hungry. I began to enjoy the fun of our adventure, and could not restrain my laughter each time Mr. Read flew at the guide, who turned out little better than an idiot. We set to work at once with our preparations for the night, and chose the cleaner of the two sheds, where Mr. Read came across a stove, left there no doubt by the workmen. He tried to light a fire, but failed for want of materials; however, he found what was almost as good, viz., a spirit lamp, with a small kettle attached to it, and some petroleum. A mountain torrent close at hand furnished the water which, before long, was boiling cheerfully away in the kettle.

The guide was too foolish to help, and the only time he did so, was clumsy enough to put

out the light. We had but a limited supply of matches, so this piece of awkwardness completely scattered the remnants of Mr. Read's patience. He shook his fist in the Iclander's face, and roared out a good round British oath, whereupon the miserable creature turned and fled, and we saw his face no more for some time. Our shed contained some rough shelves placed one on the top of another, and formed of planks of wood, unevenly nailed together; upon them, the floor being of mud, we decided to sleep.

After what seemed a delicious supper of cold meat, bread and cheese, and hot whisky and water, we wrapped ourselves round in our shawls, and disposed ourselves for the night. Our saddles made capital pillows, and although the boards of our improvised beds were very hard and rough, we were so weary that we soon fell asleep. Mr. Read was the last to retire. Cheered by his meal and a cigar, he waxed quite conversational, but as no one heeded his remarks, he got tired of soliloquising, and

sought his couch, which was the top shelf of all. Being so near the roof, and that not a very substantial one, he was kept awake for some time by the rattle of the rain and hail, and the roar of the wind, as it swept round the shed.

The next morning, at four o'clock, we were roused by the guide, who had passed the night in the other shed. On first awakening, I could not imagine where I was, but the truth soon flashed upon me, and I was eager to be on the move. We finished our provisions by way of breakfast, and directly afterwards we mounted our poor patient ponies, and retraced our steps to the edge of the plateau. There we got off and led our animals down the precipitous slopes. The wind was very keen, and rain soon began to fall in torrents. We were still in complete ignorance of our whereabouts, but had the advantage of a whole day before us; having exhausted our larder, we trusted to reach some sort of human habitation before dark.

Once down on the plain again, we thought

for a moment of finding our way back to Hafnarjörd, but soon dismissed the idea, for we disliked being beaten. We rode for hours at the foot of the mountains, drenched to the skin, chilled to the bone, very low-spirited, yet doggedly determined not to lose hope. At last, when we were very near doing so, we saw some peasants galloping in the distance; our guide dashed after them, and learnt the way. Five minutes after, to our great joy, we found ourselves upon the beaten track. I could not restrain a shout of delight, and we pushed briskly on, with our spirits revived at the prospect of reaching our proper destination at last.

Soon after this, we saw in front of us what I thought was a fiord, and we imagined that Krisuvík was close at hand. Not at all—the fiord turned out to be an extensive lake, surrounded by hills, over which we had to ride—still no Krisuvík. I began to doubt the existence of any such place, and to abandon myself to utter despair, when we passed some hot

springs, and came suddenly in sight of a couple of huts, out of one of which our Scotch acquaintance emerged to welcome us.

The place, and everything in it, was of the smallest and barest. The only available hut was partitioned off into two little cupboards of rooms, where it was scarcely possible to stand upright. There was hardly any furniture—wooden cases turned upside-down doing duty for tables and chairs; and every time the door was opened wind and rain flew straight into one's face. After all the discomfort we had gone through, and the trouble we had taken to find this thrice detestable *Krisuvík*, we had hoped for better accommodation; but our host was very kind, and made the most of his small resources. He provided us with black coffee and bread, which was about all he had to offer.

Our English friend soon joined us, eager to learn what had delayed us so long. He was horrified when he heard our story; and then it transpired that this was the first journey to

Krisuvík that our so-called guide had ever made ! He counted on his comrade to direct him, and when left to his own devices, went wrong at once. The track he had followed led only to the sulphur pit, and that had not been worked for months. Our English friend explained that he had waited several times in hopes of our overtaking him ; and at last, giving us up altogether, he was obliged to ride on to Krisuvík by himself.

The prospect of remaining on in that wretched hut was intolerable. There was hardly room for *one* to move and breathe freely, much less for *five*, and we began to feel quite stifled. The weather had evidently broken up, and a riding tour about the country, in storms of wind and rain, would appear unprofitable to the stoutest traveller. Thus, for the second time, fate arrested our steps, and we thought it wiser to gather together all our strength and courage, and return at once to the comfort of our Reykjavik lodgings. This we accordingly did, and

reached there that evening, after riding upwards of fifty miles. Having enjoyed a good supper, we sang "Home, Sweet Home," and retired to bed with our taste for excursions considerably quenched.





CHAPTER IX.

GOOD-BYE TO ICELAND.

THE next morning we were electrified to hear that the "Camoens" was in the harbour ; but this fact did not hasten our departure, for it was another week before the cargo of ponies arrived from different parts of the country. Soon after this, Gudmunsen returned from Akureyri, and great was his wrath when he found that Mr. Read had dismissed Guðni and the twelve ponies. He had the audacity to try and exact a month's payment for them, whether they had been used or not, on the plea that they would have to be paid for by somebody ; and if not by Mr. Read, he himself

would have to meet the expense. As no such agreement had been made, Mr. Read disputed the point, which was finally settled by arbitration in his favour, and Gudmunsen retired discomfited.

The day after our return from Krisuvík, a dinner was given by the Governor, as a return to the members of the Althing. Mr. Read again struggled into his holiday garb, and went off to the feast. He came back at about eight o'clock and said that the entertainment was much in the same style as the Parliamentary Banquet, only on a larger scale, there being fifty-eight guests. The usual amount of speeches were made, but not simultaneously, and the embraces, happily for Mr. Read, were less frequent and demonstrative. Two maid-servants waited at table, assisted towards the end by the governor's little daughters, and his son, aged about sixteen, poured out the champagne.

The next few days were by no means dull, the little town being full of strangers who had

congregated to depart in the "Camoens." Mrs. Finsen was good-natured enough to lend us ponies on several occasions, so we were able to ride whenever the spirit moved us.

The Pjeturssons had expressed themselves anxious to give a luncheon in our honour, and we were asked to decide the day. We chose Wednesday, September 3rd, the following morning having been fixed for the departure of our steamer. At two o'clock we entered the little drawing-room, which we found crowded with people, and the nameless one planted on the sofa in her most alarming cap. There were several small reception rooms on the ground floor, in which the company was dispersed; at this luncheon men predominated, and several of them were in dress clothes.

The Bishop had evidently braced himself up to do the civil, and being a kindly old man, he was as amiable as his scanty vocabulary would permit of. He placed himself by my side, and we exchanged remarks in a very high key for

ten minutes. His wife continued to smile ; her speechless affability was great. Thora bustled about, entertaining ubiquitously, and occasionally giving a nod of encouragement to her docile old parents.

By-and-by, we were all marshalled upstairs, where luncheon was spread, and I was much pleased with a tasteful arrangement of plants on the landing. Conversation become quite sprightly at table, and numerous Icelandic dainties were handed round. Towards the end, the Bishop rose, and, fixing his eyes upon Alice and myself, said, "*Je bois à la santé de ces dames.*" This last was silently drunk in champagne, and as no one returned thanks for us, we could but beam our gratitude. One more toast was proposed, again by our host, wishing all the travellers present, "*bon voyage.*"

This, however, did not save us from our fate, for we were caught in a heavy gale, and delayed two days. The water poured in everywhere, and we were literally flooded out of our cabins,

many of the passengers having to sleep in the saloon. Some were deeply alarmed, and one and all grumbled at the discomfort. It was quite clear to everyone that the "Camoens" was not very well fitted to battle with the heavy seas of the North Atlantic, and we were thankful to be landed in safety at Granton.

But to return to our Icelandic friends. Luncheon dismissed, we descended to the drawing-room, and chatted with Mrs. Thorberg and her sister, preserving a frigid unconsciousness of the presence of the nameless one, who did her best to extract a bow from us. One by one the groups of men broke up, and bade the Pjeturssons a ceremonious farewell. We then took a grateful farewell of the friendly old Bishop and his family, and went home, where we found Mr. Read just returned from a fishing expedition. He had shirked the Pjetursson entertainment, fearing a repetition of the chocolate and cakes, and superabundant women of the Government House luncheon. He greatly

regretted not having accompanied us when he learnt the truth. Later in the day we paid a farewell call upon Mrs. Finsen, whom we warmly thanked for all her hospitality and kindness.

That evening we were visited by a person who came to play the *Landspél* for our edification. It is supposed to be the earliest musical instrument introduced into Iceland, and is now very rarely to be heard, which may account for this particular *Landspél* being a little out of tune. The interpreter thereof laid it on the table, and proceeded to scrape its two strings with a bow, whereupon the groans and hisses of the tortured instrument moved Fanny to such mirth that she fled from the room. I felt as much irritated as amused, and yet some of the shrieks of the upper notes almost upset even my gravity. As if this were not enough, another *Landspél* was introduced. It had evidently been in the wars, for it boasted only one string ; but this did not save it from the hands of the executioner, who promptly put

it on the rack, and its cries and lamentations rent the air.

Meanwhile we all sat round, gazing at nothing particular, with our faces smoothed out into decorous attention. There was a twinkle in Alice's eye, and she maintained a stern, uncompromising silence at the end of each "air" which was made up for by Mr. Read's usual profuse compliments. By-and-by the *Landspel* player was succeeded by a lady who sang Icelandic ditties with imperturbable composure of manner, and accompanied herself upon the guitar. Between these two we passed a very musical evening, and exhausted our stock of appropriate civilities.

At last came the day which was to carry us away from that northern land—perhaps for ever—and a powerful sunshine decked her in such bright colours that we carried away with us a picture of Iceland in her softest mood. I finished my packing early, and, leaving the others struggling with their paraphernalia

of clothing, fishing-tackle, guns, and Garnet Wolseleys, I wandered up and down the familiar little streets, steeped in a sense of half-regretful contentment. I found myself examining with almost tender indulgence the scenes that soon would hold me no longer. The children, all of whom I knew, stood round and gave themselves up to the luxury of a long and unembarrassed stare; I had never resented their curiosity, and now that it was being indulged for the last time I quite encouraged it.

Women passed backwards and forwards laden with their chronic burthens of flat sun-dried fish; small boys staggered along within a square of wood from which suspended two buckets of water; idle men loafed about and smoked; and busy self-important dogs started briskly off for some indefinite destination, and then changed their minds about it.

Meanwhile all our goods and chattels were being collected, conspicuous amongst which were two packets of blue fox fur which Mrs. Read

had bought at twenty-five shillings a skin. She carefully sewed them up in canvas, and clung to them with almost convulsive tenderness. Everything else was then stowed away in a rough cart and drawn down to the landing-stage. We bade farewell to Mrs. Schulessen, who embraced me affectionately, and made us drink "bon voyage" in sweet sherry. Fanny and her little brother accompanied us down to the shore where we soon after regretfully parted from them.

By this time we were all grouped on the narrow planking of the landing-pier, and with us were a large collection of our future fellow-passengers.

The ship's boat came off to fetch us, and there was such a scramble to get in, that Alice's face began to fall, as it always does when she is in any way perturbed ; in fact, it is a regular barometer of her emotions. She thrust one of her beloved packets of skins into my arms, and held on to the other with a clutch

that never loosened, even when she was being hustled down into the boat in the grasp of two sailors.

We soon got on board, and ran all over the ship, visiting our old haunts. I found myself again doomed to the ladies' cabin, which, however, had been improved by the addition of a ventilator. It was to be shared with me by Mrs. Magnusson, two Scotch ladies, and the stewardess—an over-crowded assembly, and therefore not predisposed to friendliness. I believe that there is nothing so calculated to sour the milk of human kindness, and force one into animadversions on one's kind, as excessive juxtaposition.

Alice and I paced the sunny decks, and inspected the two hundred and seventy-six ponies in the hold, of which she was suddenly inspired to make a sketch. Nothing is safe from Alice's cunning eye and pencil.

Time wore on, and the shadows on the hills shifted; some flaky clouds crept up across the

sky, and the sunshine filtered through them upon the crests of the waves. A penetrating freshness was in the air, and the sea broke about the ship as if impatient of her delay. At last all the passengers were got on board ; amongst others was the nameless one, a prey to grotesque emotion, waving her lank yellow feather towards the shore. At half-past six o'clock the whistle sounded, and we were off.

I leant over the bulwarks, and watched the little northern town, that had given me friendly shelter for four weeks, slipping away from my sight and knowledge for ever. There is something that sobers one about all leave-taking, especially when the chances are that one is going never to return. I had been weary and bored in Reykjavik ; and yet, when every moment was taking me further from the shore, I felt as if my eyes would fain hold it gratefully before passing away.

I had known such happy days in Iceland. It had been a new link in my existence, and

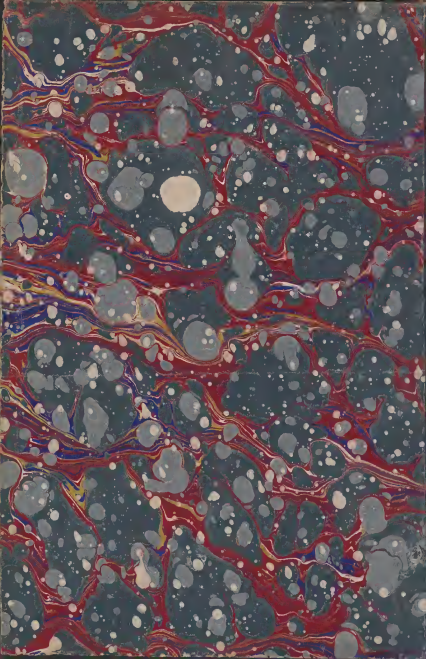
when the end had come, and the page was turned down, I realized that it had gone straight out of my life with almost ruthless abruptness, and would soon be gathered away amongst the misty pictures of my past. I think it is just in such moments as these that one's heart deepens, and life seems a revelation of beautiful future possibilities. So I watched the broken lines of the mountains darken, and the pomp of a glorious sunset flood land and sea with gold, and I sent out my heart to Iceland in a tender and long good-bye.

There was something to me ineffably sad about this distant island—a barren spot on this fair, fertile earth—branded with fire blasted by a remorseless power, rising in pitiful protest from the waves of the northern seas. For Iceland the promise of Eden has no fulfilment; the thrilling voice of spring brings no responsive answer of awakening bud and blossom; the seasons pass on, laden with no sweet

significance for her. She has only the merciful clinging mosses to clothe her naked mountain sides, and the grass and heather waving in her silent valleys.

THE END.

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